



Lessons From the Field

Serving All Students,
Including Students With Disabilities

Guide for 21st CCLC State Coordinators



YOU FOR YOUTH

All *Lessons From the Field* guides on inclusion, as well as other professional learning and technical assistance tools for 21st CCLCs, are available on the U.S. Department of Education's You for Youth (Y4Y) website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.

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U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Academic Improvement, "Guide for 21st CCLC State Coordinators," *Lessons From the Field: Serving All Students, Including Students With Disabilities*, Washington, D.C., 2016.

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Acknowledgments

This “Lessons From the Field” guide is part of a series of guides funded by the U.S. Department of Education to help 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) programs include students with disabilities. The guides include information and ideas that emerged during site visits and technical assistance to 21st CCLC programs across three states, a series of national webinars on inclusion, and ongoing consultations with a technical working group (TWG).

The “Lessons From the Field” project team owes a tremendous debt of gratitude to a multitude of state coordinators, program directors, site coordinators, school administrators and staff, and parents who enthusiastically agreed to participate. These individuals worked with the team to schedule site visits; answered questions by phone and by email; participated in on-site conversations about their students, programs and experiences; and graciously invited observers into their classrooms and playgrounds. The project also benefited greatly from the guidance and expertise of the TWG, which included Lisa Wisham, Haydee Perez, Karyl Resnick, Cheryl Jorgensen, Stephen Hinkle, Pat Halle, Ellie Mitchell, Juliana Taymans, Jill Harris, Keith Jones and Tobie Franklin.

This project was conducted by a talented, diverse team who collaborated on all aspects of the work. Alfred Vitale, project director at Leed Management Consulting, Inc. (LMCi), led the team and coordinated all work to ensure the quality and utility of the guides. Team members included LMCi’s Jennifer Lapointe (site visits, webinar production, writing and editing) and Veronica Reyes (logistics). The following staff from Synergy Enterprises, Inc. assisted throughout the project, from conception to final production: Sherri Lauver and Miranda Cairns (site visits, coordination and much more), Nancy Balow and Carla McClure (writing and editing), and Virginia Robles-Villalba (graphic design). Kids Included Together (KIT), which has years of experience in the field of inclusion, provided on-site technical assistance and guidance through all phases, including development of the “Lessons From the Field” guides. Contributors from KIT included Anna Luther, Mary Shea, Alissa Marotto and Kat King, with additional guidance and support from Torrie Dunlap and Sara Couron.

These guides would not be possible without the leadership and enthusiastic support of U.S. Department of Education staff, including Pete Eldridge, Angela Hernandez-Marshall, Danita Woodley, Valerie Randall, and especially Sylvia Lyles in the Office of Academic Improvement within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Last but not least, the entire team wishes to acknowledge everyone who uses these guides in 21st CCLC programs across the nation to improve the experiences of students with disabilities. Thank you for stepping up and making a difference in these young people’s lives!

Contents

How to Use This Guide.	v
About This Series	vi
The Meaning of “Inclusion”	1
Inclusion as a Philosophy and a Practice	1
Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs	2
Legal Foundations of Inclusion: Disability Policies at the Federal and State Levels	3
Federal Laws and Policies Related to Disability	3
How Federal Laws Apply to 21st CCLC Grantees and Subgrantees	6
State Disability Laws and Requirements	9
Encouraging Inclusive Policies for 21st CCLC Programs	10
Addressing Inclusion in the RFP or Grant Application Process	10
Building Inclusion Into Program Evaluation and Monitoring Processes	11
Supporting Subgrantees’ Capacity to Serve All Students	13
Strategic Networks and Partnerships	13
Professional Development and Technical Assistance.	16
Summary	19
Resources	19
Notes	20



21st Century Community Learning Centers

Lessons From the Field: Serving All Students, Including Students With Disabilities



After reading this guide, you'll be able to...

- ✓ Explain the legal foundations of including students with disabilities in 21st CCLC programs.
- ✓ Use strategies that encourage inclusive policies for 21st CCLC programs.
- ✓ Build programs' capacity to include students with disabilities.

Tools in this guide include...

- ✓ Action planning checklists.
- ✓ Links to key online resources, including a glossary.

This guide was created especially for 21st CCLC state coordinators as part of the U.S. Department of Education's "Lessons From the Field" series on inclusion. Its purpose is to help states address subgrantees' common operational challenges and provide guidance for supporting all students in their programs.

How to Use This Guide

Here are some ways state coordinators can use this guide, along with the topical guides described under "About This Series," to assist programs in serving students with disabilities in 21st CCLC programs:

- **Capacity building:** Read this guide for an overview of inclusion, its legal foundations, and ideas for building subgrantees' capacity to implement inclusive attitudes and practices. See the topical guides in this series to learn how state education agency leaders, 21st CCLC subgrantees, and program sites are increasing opportunities for students with disabilities to participate successfully in 21st CCLC programs.
- **Organizational planning and program improvement:** Use this guide to help plan and improve systemic supports for inclusion (e.g., policies, program evaluation and monitoring processes, networks and partnerships). Use the checklists throughout the guide to jump-start your efforts.
- **Communications:** Use stories or quotes from the "Lessons From the Field" guides in presentations, webinars and communications with program directors or site coordinators to increase their awareness and understanding of inclusion. Mention the topical guides on the appropriate section of your state education agency website, and include a link.
- **Professional development and technical assistance:** Share the topical guides in this series with 21st CCLC subgrantees in your state as professional development tools or to help answer questions from the field.

About This Series

The “Lessons From the Field” series on inclusion provides information and ideas on including students with disabilities in 21st CCLC programs. The U.S. Department of Education created the series to help programs address common operational challenges related to inclusion at the state, program and site levels. State coordinators can use the guides for their own professional development and also to build the capacity of program and site coordinators.

Each guide in the series covers a different inclusion topic and features stories and strategies from practitioners, education leaders, community partners, disability rights advocates, and others who provide or support effective inclusive practices in 21st CCLC settings.

The featured stories and strategies are based on observations and interviews with state coordinators and other program staff and community/school partners in California, Massachusetts and Utah, where the Department provided technical assistance to support inclusive practices. In addition, project staff held conversations with state coordinators in Maine, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Dakota and Wisconsin. The guides are also informed by research on inclusion and out-of-school time programming, and guidance from a technical working group that includes national experts and advocates on inclusion.

Action planning checklists and links to relevant resources are included to help state coordinators and subgrantees apply insights from research and practice to their particular challenges and contexts.



“Lessons From the Field” Topic Guides on Inclusion

The following guides are available on You for Youth (<https://y4y.ed.gov>), the Department’s online professional learning and technical assistance portal for 21st CCLCs.

	No.	Title	Central Ideas
	1	Introduction to Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what makes a program inclusive. • Identify elements of quality for inclusion. • Plan for assessment and continual improvement.
Programming for Inclusion	2	Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need To Know	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal laws and policies related to disability. • 21st CCLC subgrantees and the law: Case-by-case assessments, reasonable modifications and communication access. • State laws and requirements.
	3	Establishing Inclusive Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make physical spaces inclusive. • Make activities and materials inclusive. • Organize programming with consistent routines.
	4	Training and Developing Staff to Support Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for staff development and identify training needs. • Adopt sustainable professional development and practice. • Prepare staff for inclusion. • Provide effective state-level professional development.
Partnerships to Support Inclusion	5	Identifying and Developing Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify community partners. • View local agencies as resources to support students with disabilities and their families. • Work with state-level partners.
	6	Engaging Families and Communities to Support Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get to know the community. • Learn about students and their families during enrollment and intake. • Empower families and caregivers as advocates. • Establish effective two-way communications.
	7	Working With Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create bridges to administration and school-day staff. • Create a staffing structure to bridge school and afterschool.

	No.	Title	Central Ideas
Student Engagement	8	Working With IEPs, Section 504 Plans and Transition Plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with individualized education programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans to support students' participation in the 21st CCLC environment. • Support IEP transition planning and services.
	9	Addressing Individual Needs and Engaging All Learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify individual student needs, strengths and interests. • Plan differentiated supports to meet student needs within the 21st CCLC environment. • Incorporate strategies that engage all learners.
	10	Supporting Social-Emotional Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for social-emotional learning. • Recognize student behaviors as forms of communication. • Facilitate positive peer interactions. • Co-create expectations and agreements with students.

The Meaning of “Inclusion”

In this guide, the term “inclusion” refers to attitudes and practices that support students with disabilities, even significant disabilities, and give all an opportunity to participate in curricular and noncurricular activities.¹ The defining features of inclusion are access, participation and supports. The desired result is to provide students with a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and opportunities to develop skills and knowledge that will help them reach their full potential.

Inclusion as a Philosophy and a Practice

Inclusion is the belief that all people should have the opportunity to contribute meaningfully and to participate in all aspects of their community. In the



DEFINITION

Disability and Inclusion

These terms, as used in this guide, are defined as follows:

Disability: A mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Inclusion: Attitudes and practices that support students with disabilities, even significant disabilities, and give all an opportunity to participate; inclusion is based on the belief that people have the right to be included with their peers in age-appropriate activities throughout life.

societal context, the philosophy of inclusion holds that all people have the right to be included with their peers in age-appropriate activities throughout life. It means making people of all ages and backgrounds — including those with disabilities — feel welcome, safe and valued. Inclusive communities are ones in which all members, with and without disabilities, are respected, are viewed as capable, share a sense of belonging, and are appreciated for their contributions.²

In practice, including people who have disabilities requires a willingness to meet individual needs by providing appropriate modifications. For example, the layout of a room might need to be changed so that a person who uses a wheelchair or crutches can participate in group activities. For a person who has difficulty processing information, an activity with detailed instructions might need to include visual reminders of required steps in addition to verbal or written explanations.

Identifying and using appropriate modifications for students with disabilities is not always simple. What works for one person or context might not work for another. The range of possible modifications varies by disability and by individual need, and those needs can change over time. For these reasons, persistence and flexibility are the hallmarks of an inclusive attitude,

and attention to the individual is essential to inclusive practices.

Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs

Research and practice indicate that participation in out-of-school time environments such as 21st CCLC programs can lead to improved academic and social outcomes for students.³ Questions often arise, however, about how to include students with disabilities so that they have the opportunity to gain the same benefits as their peers.

The number of students with disabilities, and the diverse types of disabilities they experience, makes it impossible to design a one-size-fits-all approach to inclusion. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that 64 million children and youth ages 3 to 21 (or 13 percent of all U.S. public school students) received special education services in 2012–13. These services addressed the needs of students with a wide range of disabilities:

- 35 percent of these students had specific learning disabilities that affected their ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations;
- 21 percent had speech or language impairments;
- 12 percent had other health impairments limiting their strength, vitality or alertness;
- Other disabilities included autism (8 percent), intellectual disability (7 percent), developmental delay (6 percent), emotional disturbance (6 percent), multiple disabilities (2 percent), hearing impairment (1 percent), and orthopedic impairment (1 percent); and
- Deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury and visual impairments each accounted for less than 0.5 percent of children.⁴

Meeting the diverse needs of children with disabilities such as these in 21st CCLC settings can seem like a daunting task. Yet programs across the nation are rising to the challenge, as evidenced by the stories and strategies featured in this “Lessons From the Field” series.

Every 21st CCLC state coordinator can be a powerful voice in promoting inclusive attitudes and practices among subgrantees. State coordinators can raise awareness, set expectations, share information, establish systemic supports, and provide professional development tools and resources to build capacity for inclusion. They can work with other state education leaders to address challenges and remove barriers to student participation and success.



Legal Foundations of Inclusion: Disability Policies at the Federal and State Levels

Children with activity limitations are often referred to as having a disability or “special needs.” This simply means that their participation in age-appropriate activities is limited by chronic physical, developmental, behavioral or emotional conditions.⁵ This guide uses the definition of disability in the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, which describes a “person with a disability as any person who has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a history of such impairment, or is regarded as having such impairment.” The *ADA* provides the following examples of major life activities: caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, walking, sitting, reaching, lifting, breathing, learning, concentrating, communicating, interacting with others and working.

In September 2015, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education issued a joint policy statement calling for expanded efforts to build a culture of inclusion through the following actions:⁶

- Celebrate diversity of all forms and in all facets of society.
- Talk to neighbors, community members, and state and local leaders about the importance of inclusion; highlight the universal benefits of inclusion for children with and without disabilities; and counter myths, misconceptions and stereotypes about children with disabilities.
- Co-create strategic plans for inclusion at the state, local education agency, school and program levels.
- Strongly communicate inclusion as a shared responsibility and a top priority, and demonstrate commitment to inclusion through policy changes and appropriate resource allocation at all levels.

Although the joint statement focuses on including young children with disabilities in early childhood programs, it promotes a “shared vision that all people be meaningfully included in all facets of society throughout the life course.”

The *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* authorizes 21st CCLC subgrantees to support services for students with disabilities:

Sec. 4205(a)(5): AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.— Each eligible entity that receives an award under section 4204 may use the award funds to carry out a broad array of activities that advance student academic achievement and support student success, including ... services for individuals with disabilities.

Federal Laws and Policies Related to Disability

Three laws provide the legal foundation for inclusion in 21st CCLC programs: Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004*.

DEFINITION

What Are “Reasonable Modifications?”

Under a regulatory provision implementing *Title II* of the *Americans with Disabilities Act*, public entities are required to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices or procedures when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the public entity can demonstrate that making the modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the service, program or activity.

Office for Civil Rights, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, 29 U.S.C. 794

“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States ... shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

The U.S. Department of Education enforces Section 504 in programs and activities that receive funds from the Department, and has published a regulation implementing Section 504 (34 C.F.R. Part 104), available at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act* prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in federally funded programs, including nonprofit and for-profit agencies, public schools, and extracurricular or religious programs. Section 504 requires that the needs of students with disabilities be met as adequately as the needs of students without disabilities. It covers all students with disabilities, regardless of whether they qualify for special education services, because it broadly defines disability as “a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.” Students who have a “504 plan” often have learning or attention disabilities and also have documentation that the disability limits their ability to learn and participate in a general education classroom. A student’s 504 plan details specific modifications, supports or services provided in general education settings. Each district develops its own 504 plan format, as no standard format is provided in the legislation.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

The *ADA* describes “a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.” It requires “reasonable

accommodations” for people with disabilities to access public activities and sites, providing them with equal opportunities to participate in daily life. All federal, state and local government facilities and activities must be accessible to everyone, regardless of ability. Likewise, any program that receives federal funds must meet ADA requirements, and programs that receive state funds must meet any additional state requirements for including persons with disabilities.

In the context of education, *reasonable modifications* to policies, practices or procedures must be provided to avoid discrimination on the basis of disability, unless the modifications would cause a fundamental alteration or undue burden as defined by law. A *fundamental alteration* is something that changes the nature of the program. An *undue burden* is a significant difficulty or expense to the program. To determine whether a modification would pose an undue burden, the program must consider the nature and cost of the modification and the overall financial resources of the subgrantee organization or agency.

Americans with Disabilities Act, § 36.104

Disability means, with respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.

Facility means all or any portion of buildings, structures, sites, complexes, equipment, rolling stock or other conveyances, roads, walks, passageways, parking lots, or other real or personal property, including the site where the building, property, structure, or equipment is located.

These definitions are included in the revised *Title III* regulation, which integrates the Department’s 2010 regulatory provisions with the text of *Title III*. The revised regulation is available at http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/titleIII_2010_regulations.htm#anchor3508.

Programs are not required to provide specialized services outside of their focus or area of expertise. For example, they are not required to provide skilled nursing or therapeutic intervention services if they are not otherwise provided in the program. However, in many cases, it is considered a reasonable modification for a program to allow another agency to provide such services in the program facility. For example, if a child's family seeks private behavioral therapy services, the afterschool program could allow the child's behavioral therapist to work with the child on-site to help meet personal and program goals (e.g., to coach the child in

initiating positive interactions with peers or resolving conflicts with peers).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA)

Passed in 1975 and amended in 2004, *IDEA* requires public schools to make available to all eligible children with disabilities a "free appropriate public education" in the least restrictive environment for their individual needs. *IDEA* requires public school systems to develop an individualized education program (IEP) for each child with a disability. As with 504 plans, no standardized form is defined in the legislation, so IEPs look different from one place to another. See topic guide 8, "Working With IEPs, Section 504 Plans and Transition Plans," for more about IEPs, *IDEA* privacy protections for students with disabilities and *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* requirements pertaining to educational records.

If participation in a 21st CCLC program is considered important to the student's development, it can be written into the IEP. Then the modifications and supports the child relies on during the school day should follow the child into the afterschool program. Each state must provide regulations and guidance for implementing *IDEA*, though a number of states have additional regulations beyond the federal requirements.



IDEA, Part D

The first purpose of *IDEA* is stated as follows:

"(1)(A) to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living." (Page 118, Stat. 2651)

Available at <http://idea.ed.gov/download/statute.html>.

Federal Disability Laws and Policies Checklist

- **Distribute topic guide 2, “Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need to Know,” to subgrantees.** This topical guide in the Department’s “Lessons From the Field” series on inclusion provides an overview of federal laws related to disability for program directors and site coordinators.
- **Build a collection of resources on federal disability laws for subgrantees.** Consider adding an “understanding federal disability laws” resource page to your website, and include the following information and links:
 - **U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.** For guidance and resources on *IDEA*, including best practices from the field and tips for teachers and parents, go to <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>.
 - The **ADA Information Line** provides free information and publications about *ADA* requirements, including the *ADA* Standards for Accessible Design. Phone 800-514-0301 (voice) or 800-514-0383 (TTY). <http://www.ada.gov/infoline.htm>
 - **The U.S. Department of Justice ADA Technical Assistance Program** provides free information and technical assistance to businesses, nonprofit service providers, state and local governments, people with disabilities, and the general public. Technical assistance services include up-to-date information about how to comply with *ADA* requirements. <http://www.ada.gov>
 - The **Child Care Law Center** is a nonprofit organization devoted exclusively to the complex legal issues that affect child care. Download printable resources and FAQs about the *ADA* and other laws. <http://childcarelaw.org>
 - **Kids Included Together (KIT)** is a nonprofit with a mission to teach inclusive practices to organizations and people who serve children. KIT offers an informational booklet titled “Understanding the Laws Supporting Inclusion.” Access the booklet at http://www.kitonline.org/html/about/publications/2013_understanding_the_laws_supporting_inclusion.html.
 - **Understood** is a collaboration of 15 nonprofit organizations that offers information for parents of students with learning and attention disabilities. See its easy-to-read introduction to Section 504 plans (“Understanding 504 Plans”). Although written for parents, the information also has value for 21st CCLC subgrantees and program staff. <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/504-plan/understanding-504-plans>

How Federal Laws Apply to 21st CCLC Grantees and Subgrantees

The *ADA* and Section 504 require grantees and subgrantees to offer services to all students who meet the basic age and eligibility requirements for the 21st CCLC program. In other words, a student may not

be turned away based solely on the fact that he or she has a disability or other condition.

Under Section 504, grantees and subgrantees *cannot*

- Deny a qualified youth the opportunity to participate;

- Provide a student with a disability an opportunity to participate that is not equal to the opportunity of others (e.g., tell a parent that the student can attend the program only on Mondays and Wednesdays because those are the only days that additional staff are available to support the student’s needs);
- Provide different or separate programs to students with disabilities (instead, subgrantees should group students with disabilities with same-age peers who do not have disabilities); and/or
- Otherwise limit a student in the enjoyment of any right, privilege, advantage or opportunity enjoyed by other students (e.g., tell a student he cannot attend the field trip because an accessible bus is not available).

Under the *ADA*, grantees and subgrantees *cannot*

- Deny program acceptance or enrollment to a qualified youth;
- Make assumptions about whether a student can participate based on his or her disability or condition;
- Use admissions policies that exclude students with disabilities (e.g., require that students use the bathroom independently); and/or
- Require students with disabilities to accept modifications they do not want (e.g., require that the student have a 1:1 aide during program hours).

Subgrantees have a legal obligation to provide the following services for students with disabilities: individualized assessments, reasonable modifications and communication access.

Individualized Assessments

The *ADA* requires subgrantees to make an “individualized assessment” of what each student with a disability needs in order to participate in the 21st CCLC program — and whether the program can meet the particular needs of a student with a disability without fundamentally altering the nature

of the service, program or activity being provided, or incurring significant difficulty or expense. Assessments must be based on the individual student, the program environment and available resources. Grantees cannot base decisions on stereotypes or presuppositions about what the student with a disability can or cannot do or how much assistance the student might require. Modifications provided in the 21st CCLC setting may differ from those provided in school. For example, some students might need an aide during the school day but participate in the 21st CCLC program without one.

Reasonable Modifications

Grantees are required to make reasonable modifications to policies, practices and procedures to support the participation of qualified students with disabilities. Modifications can promote access to learning, recreation, leisure or work. Access means enrollment in the 21st CCLC program, physical access and having support to participate in all activities in meaningful ways.

Interpreting what “reasonable modifications” means and looks like is often challenging for providers, parents and even the courts. Generally speaking, modifications are reasonable if they do not result in a fundamental alteration to the nature of the program or cause an undue burden (significant difficulty or expense). Grantees and subgrantees are not required to make fundamental alterations, which in general means they are not required to offer services that are outside the program scope.

For example, the majority of 21st CCLC programs do not offer direct mental health services to students. Under the law, programs that do not offer such services are not required to offer them to include a student with a disability because it would fundamentally alter the nature of the program from an educational, recreational program to a therapeutic one.

Grantees and subgrantees need to consider the following factors in determining whether a modification is reasonable:

- The actual needs of the student, free from judgment about whether the student can participate in the program;
- How services are provided to all students and how that relates to the modification required (e.g., all students play outdoors for a portion of the afternoon; however, the playground is not accessible to a student who uses a wheelchair due to a narrow doorway); and
- The resources available to the program to provide the modification at little or no cost to the program (e.g., partnering with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation to provide a skilled nursing aide).

For examples of reasonable modifications, see “Commonly Asked Questions About Child Care and the ADA” on the U.S. Department of Justice ADA Information and Technical Assistance website (www.ada.gov/childqanda.htm). The responses in the document specify factors to consider when determining whether a modification is reasonable. For example:

Question: “We do not normally diaper children of any age who are not toilet trained. Do we still have to help older children who need diapering or toileting assistance due to a disability?”

Answer: “It depends. To determine when it is a reasonable modification to provide diapering for an older child who needs diapering because of a disability and a center does not normally provide diapering, the center should consider factors including, but not limited to, (1) whether other non-disabled children are young enough to need intermittent toileting assistance when, for instance, they have accidents; (2) whether providing toileting assistance or diapering on a regular basis would require a child care provider to leave other children unattended; and (3) whether the center would have to purchase diapering tables or other equipment. If the program never provides toileting assistance to any child, however, then such a personal

service would not be required for a child with a disability. Please keep in mind that even in these circumstances, the child could not be excluded from the program because he or she was not toilet trained if the center can make other arrangements, such as having a parent or personal assistant come and do the diapering.”

Modifications that are appropriate in a school setting might not be appropriate in the 21st CCLC setting.

Communication Access

Under *Title II of ADA*, programs receiving federal funding must, without charge, ensure that communication with students with disabilities, and with any student’s adult family members who have disabilities, is as effective as communication with others. This requirement gives primary consideration to students and parents in determining which auxiliary aids and services are necessary to provide effective communication. Here are a few examples — but remember, the use of particular aids and services must be based on individualized assessments:

- For a student who is deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing: exchange of written materials, sign language interpreters, note takers, assistive listening systems, accessible electronic and information technology, and open and closed captioning.
- For a student who is blind, deaf-blind, or has low vision: qualified readers, taped texts, audio recordings, Braille materials and refreshable Braille displays, accessible e-book readers, screen reader software, magnification software, optical readers and large-print materials.
- For a student with a speech disability: a picture, word or letter board; writing materials; spelling to communicate; a qualified sign language interpreter; a portable device that writes and/or produces speech; and telecommunications services.

Federal Laws and 21st CCLC Grantees Checklist

- ❑ **Provide guidance on what the federal laws mandate related to serving students with disabilities.** A “serving all students” fact sheet could be included in the state’s request for proposal (RFP), with a list of resources subgrantees could consult for additional information about legal requirements.
- ❑ **Develop an individualized assessment checklist** for subgrantees to complete as part of the enrollment process for students with disabilities. Subgrantees could use the checklist as a blueprint for gathering information about the student and making appropriate modifications.
- ❑ **Ask subgrantees to propose appropriate ways to make reasonable modifications that would support students with specific types of needs.** Consider establishing a process by which subgrantees with experience in supporting students with disabilities can share their expertise with newer subgrantees. It is helpful for subgrantees to see how programs similar to theirs modify policies, practices and procedures in the 21st CCLC environment, and how these programs have met needs by partnering with others, such as deaf studies departments at universities, local parks and recreational facilities that typically have interpreters at events, or the state school for the blind if Braille is needed. Descriptions of proposed modifications could be organized by category (i.e., physical access, program access and communication access) or by type of need (communication, developmental, social-emotional) and distributed during statewide meetings or professional development events.

State Disability Laws and Requirements

State laws and requirements set the direction for how 21st CCLC programs implement federal legislation such as *IDEA* to provide services for students with disabilities. State education agencies align their policies and decisions with these laws. State coordinators need to

be aware of state laws and requirements as they provide guidance to 21st CCLC subgrantees.

As a 21st CCLC state coordinator, you can use the grant application process and program evaluation and monitoring process to communicate that inclusion is a priority for 21st CCLC programs and to set the tone for inclusive policies among subgrantees.

State Disability Laws and Requirements Checklist

- ❑ **Visit the special education area of the state department of education website** for information on state disability laws, as well as technical assistance, resources and information for parents.
- ❑ **Talk with state special education leaders** about state-specific laws and requirements.
- ❑ **Research recommended state resources for supporting inclusion.** Your state department of education website might provide links to resources for serving students with disabilities. The websites of state health and human services agencies (especially those that focus on supporting children with disabilities) might also help you identify local resources.

Encouraging Inclusive Policies for 21st CCLC Programs

Addressing Inclusion in the RFP or Grant Application Process

As you manage the subgrant process for entities described in *ESSA* §4201(b)(3) as eligible for 21st CCLC grants (i.e., local education agencies; community-based organizations; Indian tribes or tribal organizations; other public or private entities; or a consortium of two or more such agencies, organizations or entities), consider how you might use your RFP or similar application format to communicate that inclusion is a priority. Maine, for example, recently updated its RFP to include language reminding applicants of their legal obligations within Section 504 of the *Rehabilitation Act*. State coordinator Travis Doughty commented, “I don’t think that, historically, all of our subgrantees were aware of these requirements.”

Assigning points for inclusion lets potential subgrantees know what is expected. For example, the scoring rubric

in Utah’s grant application specifies basic expectations for inclusion (i.e., planning to ensure that students with disabilities are included in all proposed program activities, and coordinating with school administrators and teachers).

The RFP process can help you plan responsive professional development and technical assistance for 21st CCLC subgrantees in your state. For example, suppose your RFP asks applicants how they plan to adhere to federal requirements such as providing reasonable modifications. Applicants’ responses can provide insight into how they understand the laws, how they serve (or plan to serve) students with disabilities, and where they might need additional support. During the RFP review process, you can evaluate trends and plan supports accordingly. For example, if subgrantees indicate they do not have a process for gathering information about how to support a child with a disability, technical assistance could focus on conducting and using individualized assessments to provide appropriate supports for inclusion.

Story From the Field

Getting Inclusion Into the RFP

Lisa Wisham, 21st CCLC State Coordinator, Utah

Last year I added an “inclusion” section to Utah’s 21st CCLC application and included the following question on both the application and the scoring rubric: *How will your team ensure that students with disabilities are included in all of your proposed program activities? Describe your planned coordination with school administrators and teachers to ensure collaboration for students with disabilities in your inclusive environments.* I drew attention to it during the mandatory bidders conference. Most responses, however, were very general. Some didn’t even mention collaborating with schools to discuss students with IEPs. For the next competition, I spent more time discussing this question at the bidders conference. I added examples to help the applicants think about strategies for collaboration and resources for inclusion (such as materials from Kids Included Together) and highlighted key points to include in their responses. The responses this year are much more robust, with applicants mentioning activities such as creating memorandums of understanding with special education offices and arranging for their programs to be involved in IEP meetings. Clearly, putting the item on the RFP signaled that the state is committed to inclusion, and subgrantees now take this seriously.

Request for Proposals Checklist

Here are some ways state coordinators can signal that inclusion is a priority and elicit information about inclusion from prospective subgrantees:

- **Ask applicants to describe their process for enrolling students with disabilities.** Applicants' responses will help you evaluate whether they plan to make individualized assessments of students' needs and base decisions on the student's needs rather than on the diagnosis. For example, you might include the following question in your RFP: "Please describe your process for enrolling students with disabilities. What specific steps will you take when you learn that a student has a diagnosed disability?" For a discussion of issues related to enrollment, see "Growing Ideas: Admissions Policies and Practices That Build Inclusive Child Care Communities (for Providers)" from the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies. <https://ccids.umaine.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2014/02/admiss-providers-tip-022714.pdf>
- **Ask applicants to describe their plan for making modifications to support students with disabilities.** For example, you might include the following question in your RFP: "Please describe your plan for modifying policies, practices and procedures to support students with disabilities. How will you determine whether a modification is reasonable? Provide a real or hypothetical example of a reasonable modification."

Building Inclusion Into Program Evaluation and Monitoring Processes

Adding specific measures for inclusion into your program evaluation and compliance monitoring protocols can encourage inclusive practices and help subgrantees understand minimum requirements and help take appropriate actions. These measures can also provide data on where subgrantees are doing well, where they are struggling, and where they need professional development or technical assistance.

In Oklahoma, state coordinator Sonia Johnson reports, "Our monitoring tool includes questions about equitable access and participation, and we ask for documentation such as enrollment and hiring policies. What we're seeing is that programs often don't have these documents in place." Findings such as these can help the state identify needs for targeted resources or technical assistance.

Consider inviting specialists from your state's special education department to participate in program quality evaluation and monitoring so that they can provide expertise, insights and suggestions on inclusion issues.



Using Program Quality and Compliance Monitoring to Address Inclusion

Haydee Y. Perez-Livingston, 21st CCLC Coordinator, New Jersey

In New Jersey, all 21st CCLC programs get an on-site program quality visit and a compliance monitoring visit in their first and third years of funding. Program quality visits are classified as technical assistance. During these visits, the state’s contracted technical assistance provider, the New Jersey School Age Care Coalition (NJSACC), uses a self-assessment tool based on the [NJ Quality Standards for Afterschool \(NJQSA\)](#). One of these standards addresses “special needs and the whole child.” NJQSA self-assessment tools help programs determine whether their activities are engaging all learners, and whether each youth’s social-emotional well-being is being considered by the staff and the program as a whole. NJQSA resources include an action planning tool and links to resources relevant to identified areas of need. NJSACC collaborates with the subgrantee to develop strategies to address any areas in need of improvement. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) does not collect the self-assessments; however, the subgrantee must maintain a record of the program quality visit. The goal is for subgrantees to perform a second self-assessment later in the year to determine progress toward self-selected goals. Also later in the year, NJDOE staff conduct separate on-site compliance monitoring visits to assess the program’s implementation effectiveness and progress toward achieving 21st CCLC program indicators, goals and objectives — including those associated with supporting students with special needs.

Program Evaluation and Monitoring Checklist

- Reach out to other state coordinators** to see how they use their program evaluation and monitoring processes to encourage and support the inclusion of students with disabilities and special needs.
- Evaluate the outcomes of program quality evaluation and compliance monitoring activities** to better understand the professional learning and technical assistance needs of subgrantees in supporting students with disabilities. You may wish to include the following program quality indicators in your program evaluation process:
 - Subgrantee has systemic supports and partnerships to support inclusion.
 - Subgrantee focuses on student abilities and strengths.
 - Subgrantee communicates its program as inclusive for students with disabilities.
 - Subgrantee supports meaningful communication, contributions and participation for all students.
 - Subgrantee provides professional learning opportunities on inclusion.

Supporting Subgrantees' Capacity to Serve All Students

The actions described so far in this guide — making subgrantees aware of the legal foundations for inclusion and communicating inclusion as a priority for 21st CCLC programs — are important first steps for state coordinators as they build subgrantees' capacity for including students with disabilities. This section of the guide suggests ways state coordinators can build capacity for inclusive attitudes and practices through (1) networks and partnerships, (2) professional development and (3) technical assistance.

Strategic Networks and Partnerships

As a state coordinator, you can create statewide professional learning networks to leverage resources to support the inclusion of children and youth with various disabilities, from birth through young adulthood. As you network and partner with other state education offices and state agencies — and with faith-based and community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, parent groups and other entities — you can build systemic support to help 21st CCLC subgrantees

address all students' academic success, social-emotional needs, health and general well-being.

State and local partnerships can share information, resources and effective practices to support subgrantees' efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Many 21st CCLC programs have developed strong partnerships at the state level. For example, when the state coordinator in Utah learned about a principal who was trying to keep “those kinds of kids” out of a 21st CCLC program, she responded by looking to the Utah Leadership Academy (ULA) “to build leadership capacity at all levels to support a continuum of high-quality afterschool and community school programs as well as comprehensive neighborhood approaches that promote youth academic and social success.” ULA partners include local colleges, state education department offices, the Utah Afterschool Network and state human services agencies. See the “Story From the Field” on the next page for an example of effective partnership within the state education agency in Massachusetts.



Partnering With State Special Education Departments

Karyl Resnick, State Coordinator, Massachusetts

The relationship between the Special Education Policy and Planning Unit (SEPP) and 21st CCLC programs in Massachusetts is what Karyl Resnick calls a “real example of what true partnership looks like.” SEPP provides funding to enhance the capacity of current 21st CCLC programs to include students with IEPs in an array of activities that complement their school-day programs, advance student achievement, and provide opportunities to socialize and participate with peers with and without disabilities. In Massachusetts, 21st CCLC programs can apply for up to an additional \$10,000 per site to hire additional qualified special education staff, hire special education facilitators and liaisons, and provide professional development on inclusive practices. The funding opportunity was initiated by a call to Karyl from Carolyn Rocheleau, a 21st CCLC program director in Lowell. Carolyn had received many referrals from teachers of students with IEPs, and she was finding it difficult in the context of her budget to meaningfully include the students. Her programs needed additional staff supports, training and specialized transportation services. Karyl responded to Carolyn’s need by partnering with SEPP to conduct a small pilot of SEPP grant funding for the summer program. Data gathered from the pilot were used to justify continued funding. Students with IEPs at sites that receive the funding have shown improved test scores, and grant recipients have expanded access to 21st CCLC programs for students with disabilities and their families.

State or national networks and partnerships can often provide specialized resources to support students with disabilities. Some potential partners might focus on serving children and youth with particular disabilities, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, speech or language impairments and learning disabilities, while others might focus on the needs of students in particular age groups.

Some state and national organizations specialize in early childhood (birth to eight years old). A 21st CCLC program that serves kindergarteners through third graders can work with its local child care resource and referral agency, and connect with the early childhood network. State offices of early education and care generally have statewide networks. For example, in Massachusetts, the Department of Early Education and Care has Coordinated Family and Community Engagement programs to serve families with children from birth to school age. The program aims to increase

knowledge of and access to high-quality programs and services; promote parent education, family engagement and early literacy; facilitate collaboration and community planning between local early education, care partners and other community stakeholders; provide information and support to families with children transitioning between early education, home and school; and support programs across public and private sectors in delivering high-quality services.

State vocational rehabilitation agencies offer education, training and other services for adults with disabilities, and counselors from these agencies can be included on an eligible student’s IEP transition team to help middle or high school students plan for life beyond high school. These services focus on a student’s needs or interests in areas such as higher education or training, independent living, and employment. The federal government’s [Disability.gov](https://www.disability.gov) website provides information about other organizations and resources relevant to transition.

State-Level Partnerships Checklist

- ❑ **Network within your department of education system.** Join committees and task forces that cross units, if you are not already involved. Target activities that will enable you to become active in areas related to special education and serving students with disabilities.

- ❑ **Research state agencies that may be able to provide additional support** for students with disabilities in 21st CCLC programs. The following links to federal agencies can help you find and explore their counterparts at the state level:
 - **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS):** This agency provides essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves. HHS administers more than 100 programs, including foster care, mental health and early intervention in many states. <http://www.hhs.gov>

 - **Administration for Children and Families:** This division of HHS promotes the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals and communities with partnerships, funding, guidance, training and technical assistance. It is a resource for trauma-informed care and supporting students who are in the foster care system. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov>

 - **Office of Early Learning at the U.S. Department of Education:** This office aims to improve health, social-emotional and cognitive outcomes for all children from birth through third grade so that all children, particularly those with high needs, are on track to graduate from high school ready for college and career success. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oesel/index.html>

 - **Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities:** Part of the Administration for Community Living at HHS, this program supports Developmental Disabilities Networks in every state. These networks aim to meet the diverse needs of individuals with disabilities. <http://www.acl.gov/Programs/AIDD/Index.aspx>

 - **MentalHealth.gov:** Also part of HHS, this initiative focuses on social and emotional health. <http://mentalhealth.gov>

 - **Rehabilitation Services Administration:** Part of the U.S. Department of Education, this office works on employment-related services for individuals with disabilities. The state-level program may be a natural partner for 21st CCLC sites that serve high school students. <http://rsa.ed.gov>

- ❑ **Identify other organizations that might provide support or resources.** Potential partners include health care organizations, advocacy groups, professional organizations, colleges and universities, businesses, and faith-based and community-based organizations.

- ❑ **Connect directors of programs and sites that serve young elementary students to early childhood networks and statewide systems.** Although you may be aware of these resources, many program and site directors may not know how to connect to them.

Continued on next page

State-Level Partnerships Checklist (continued)

- **Share information about organizations that support transition planning and services.** Many national and local organizations, including universities, nonprofit organizations and community agencies, provide helpful guidance for program staff, teachers and families about helping students with disabilities transition from high school to college or career. See examples below.
 - The **PACER Center** is a nonprofit parent training and information center for families of children and youth with all disabilities from birth to young adult. <http://www.pacer.org/publications/transition.asp#handouts>
 - The **Institute for Innovative Transition** works to improve quality of life for people with developmental disabilities as they transition from school age to adulthood. <http://www.nytransition.org/what-we-do/transition/>
 - The **Youth Transition Experiences** webinar features youth leaders in the “I am Norm” campaign. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mU1956ysJs>
 - The **HSC Foundation’s National Youth Transitions Center** assists youth and young people with disabilities in creating and living a self-directed path to adulthood and employment. <http://www.thenytc.org>
 - The **Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD)** is committed to full participation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education. <https://www.ahead.org/students-parents/transitions>

Professional Development and Technical Assistance

Successful inclusion depends on proper training and support for professionals.⁷ Individuals who participate in training specific to serving children with disabilities have shown greater comfort levels and willingness to serve those children.⁸ Factors that influence staff working with students with disabilities in afterschool programs include attitude, subjective norms and perceived issues with behavior control.⁹

Out-of-school time programs report their most common challenge to be supporting students with behavioral and social-emotional needs. Lack of capacity to manage behavior or meet social-emotional needs in a 21st CCLC program sometimes results in excluding students who need the program the most. However, inclusive afterschool programs for children and youth

with disabilities can have positive effects on the social-emotional and academic development of all children.

Research on implementing professional development for inclusion suggests that the right training can change attitudes toward inclusion, and often has a lasting impact on staff beliefs and assumptions about children and youth with disabilities.¹⁰ States use a variety of strategies to coordinate effective professional learning opportunities, as described below.

Statewide Knowledge and Competency Base for Providers of 21st CCLC Programs

Think about ways to ensure that all providers working in 21st CCLC programs have a shared understanding of the knowledge and competencies necessary to serve students with disabilities. A good starting point would be to work with other state leaders to review existing

state-defined competencies and expand them to focus on serving students with diverse needs. The group could discuss whether they speak specifically to the skills needed to include students with disabilities. When creating related professional development, consider the following elements:

- Understanding development in middle childhood and adolescence;
- Selecting and using effective behavior support strategies;
- Adapting the environment, materials and activities;
- Providing coping strategies and other social-emotional supports for students;
- Making modifications based on the needs of individual students;
- Celebrating cultural diversity; and
- Viewing disability as a form of diversity.

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

As national, state and local organizations work to strengthen support for students with disabilities, there is growing recognition of the need to share information, resources and effective practices. Often, practitioners find it helpful to see someone in a similar role or program environment using strategies effectively. Creating a state network and professional learning community around serving students with disabilities can provide the platform needed for inclusive practices to take hold.

DEFINITION

What Is a Community of Practice?

A CoP is a group of people who agree to interact regularly; they share a common desire to improve the ways they learn about and implement evidence-based practices to solve a persistent problem or improve practice in an area that is important to them.

A CoP can be an effective format for engaging collective knowledge and experience in serving students with disabilities. The three characteristics of a CoP are (1) a shared area of interest; (2) a community formed by members engaging in joint activities and discussions; and (3) a shared repertoire of resources, experiences, tools and problem-solving skills developed through sustained interaction over time.¹¹

CoPs can provide a critical space for programs in your state to reflect on practices, and they also provide ongoing opportunities for peer feedback. Both elements of CoPs can have a positive impact on student outcomes. You could lead the initial effort yourself, and perhaps designate weekly or biweekly times to meet by phone or email to discuss best practices in inclusion. Encourage practitioners to share their experiences, learn from one another and take ownership of the CoP. Once the CoP has established ongoing peer-to-peer communication, you might reduce or withdraw your regular participation as others assume leadership of the group.

E-Forums: Sometimes, professionals are unable to attend in-person statewide training sessions or other meetings. Formats such as e-Forums can make

Story From the Field

Putting Inclusion on the Agenda

Jan Mermin, State Coordinator, Rhode Island

One of the nice things about being in a small state like Rhode Island is that I meet with program directors and site coordinators monthly, so we can talk in depth about important issues. We've made "supporting students with disabilities" part of the agenda because this issue is clearly on their minds. They recognize that it's hard to talk about inclusion as one distinct thing because students have such a variety of needs, so there's always a lot to discuss. Making inclusion a regular agenda item provides a natural opportunity for information sharing and peer-to-peer learning.

important sessions widely available by broadcasting presentations from a central location to a network of sites. Coordinators at each satellite location can facilitate interaction. Topic ideas for e-Forums include modifications and supports; collaboration among families, program, school and community; facilitating peer engagement; social-emotional skill development; creating quality environments; and school-age, tween and teen development and developmentally appropriate practices.

Program Leaders as Trainers: Although it is not possible to send every 21st CCLC staff member to every state and local professional learning opportunity

relevant to inclusion, it is possible to have selected program leaders or other staff members share what they have learned with their colleagues and with new hires. In Massachusetts, when professional development opportunities arise, the state coordinator sends a training calendar to all program directors. In the Wareham Public Schools program, the director passes this information on, and school-day teachers who work in the 21st CCLC program sometimes attend. Those teachers bring their learning back to train colleagues.

See topic guide 4, “Training and Developing Staff to Support Inclusion.”

Strategies for State-Level Professional Learning Checklist

- **Identify stakeholders from local and statewide groups** to help subgrantees build their capacity for collective impact.
- **Collaborate with other states to learn how they approach statewide professional learning** for their subgrantees. For example, check out the North Carolina Afterschool Professional Core Competencies. http://www.nccap.net/media/pages/A_FINAL-CORE_COMPETENCIES.pdf
- **Provide or support professional development on inclusion for 21st CCLC program staff and volunteers.** Encourage program directors to provide information and training on inclusion for all staff members, including new hires.
- **Organize Communities of Practice.** Using the data gathered from the RFP and from program evaluation and monitoring processes, link subgrantees that struggle with a specific aspect of inclusion to other subgrantees that excel in that area to form CoPs. This approach creates a network of programs with expertise in varying areas of inclusive practice and provides a platform for peer-to-peer professional development.
- **Use statewide meetings and other regular communications to highlight successes.** Recognizing — indeed, celebrating — subgrantees for their work to support all students can happen whenever you bring together 21st CCLC programs from across your state. You can also recognize subgrantee successes by highlighting success stories and strategies in emails. Hint: Including a “gold star” in every email may increase the likelihood that program staff will actually open and read your messages.

Summary

State coordinators can build subgrantees' capacity to include students with disabilities in 21st CCLC programs by (1) creating awareness of the legal foundations for inclusion; (2) communicating inclusion as a priority for 21st CCLC programs by building it into the RFP, evaluation and monitoring processes; (3) establishing strategic networks and partnerships within the state to support inclusive attitudes and practices; and (4) supporting professional development and technical assistance on effective inclusion strategies.

The ideas and strategies in this guide can help state coordinators plan and improve systemic supports for

inclusion. Topical companion guides provide program and site-level guidance on inclusion. These guides are available on the You for Youth website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>. State coordinators can share all or parts of those guides with subgrantees to build capacity over time or to provide just-in-time assistance.

The “Stories From the Field” included throughout the guides hint at the wealth of knowledge and experience that exists among state 21st CCLC leaders. Much more can be learned as state coordinators network and consult with one another and share their expertise about serving students with disabilities.

Resources

The checklists in this guide include links to selected resources relevant to inclusion.

Ten topical “Lessons From the Field” guides on inclusion, as well as a glossary, are available on the Department’s You for Youth website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>. The checklist at the end of each topical guide includes links to selected resources. See pages vii-viii in this document for a list of titles and topics.

The You for Youth website (<https://y4y.ed.gov>) includes professional learning and technical assistance tools for 21st CCLCs on topics such as project-based learning; aligning with the school day; civic learning and engagement; family engagement; literacy; science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and strengthening partnerships.

Notes

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¹¹ M. Singh, C. Prescott, and J. Radner, “A Community of Practice Model for Social Inclusion: An Evaluation,” *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations* 9, no. 4 (2009): 121-34.

