



# 21st Century Community Learning Centers

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



### Topic Guide 1

# Introduction to Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs

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

- ✓ Understand what makes a program inclusive.
- ✓ Identify elements of quality for inclusion.
- ✓ Plan for assessment and continual improvement.

### Tools in this guide include...

- ✓ An action planning checklist, with links to selected resources.
- ✓ A quick-start checklist and action planning form.

### Understanding What Makes a Program Inclusive

“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.

Having an inclusive 21st CCLC program requires much more than simply enrolling students with disabilities. The defining markers of inclusive programs are (1) access to a wide variety of physical, social and educational environments; (2) student participation in these environments; and (3) supports that enable students to access and participate at every level within these environments. These features are described in a joint statement on inclusion from The Council for Exceptional Children’s Division for Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children, but they apply to inclusion across all ages and grade levels.

As state coordinators and program directors carefully consider the concept of inclusion and its defining features (access, participation and support), they can create a clear vision for establishing a program environment that accepts and accommodates human



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>.

differences. This vision can foster inclusive attitudes and practices as program leaders and staff make decisions that support the participation of all students, including those with various disabilities.

## Identifying Elements of Quality for Inclusive Programming

Once a vision for inclusive programming is established, the planning, implementation and assessment cycle can begin. As you plan for inclusion, consider the elements of quality described below. You might find it helpful to consult the other guides in the *Lessons From the Field* series on inclusion, as they address several elements of program quality.

### **Lessons From the Field: Topic Guides on Inclusion**

*These guides can help 21st CCLC programs plan for inclusion. They are available, along with a glossary of related terms, on the Y4Y website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.*

1. Introduction to Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs
2. Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need to Know
3. Establishing Inclusive Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines
4. Training and Developing Staff to Support Inclusion
5. Identifying and Developing Partnerships
6. Engaging Families and Communities to Support Inclusion
7. Working With Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion
8. Working With IEPs, Section 504 Plans and Transition Plans
9. Addressing Individual Needs and Engaging All Learners
10. Supporting Social-Emotional Learning

### DEFINITION

#### Defining Markers of Inclusive Programs

- ★ Access to a wide variety of physical, social and educational environments.
- ★ Participation in these environments.
- ★ Support for meaningful access and participation at every level within these environments.

**Meeting federal and state requirements.** Three federal laws provide the legal foundation for inclusion in 21st CCLC programs: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Under these laws, grantees have a legal obligation to provide case-by-case assessments of students with disabilities; make reasonable modifications in policies, practices and procedures; and ensure communication access for students (or their family members) with disabilities. It is also important to understand state-specific laws and policies related to special education services, as they may expand on the federal laws in a variety of ways. For more information, see topic guide 2, “Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need to Know.”

In addition to reviewing legal requirements, programs can review their state’s request for proposals (RFP), paying particular attention to language about inclusion. Some states ask applicants about inclusion as part of the grant application process. For example, Utah asks applicants to describe how they will ensure that students with disabilities are included in all program activities. Reviewing this language — as well as the state’s monitoring plan and 21st CCLC evaluation requirements — can help programs keep their commitments, stay in compliance and incorporate inclusive practices.

Although grantee data must be reported to the U.S. Department of Education annually, specific evaluation requirements may vary by state. You can learn more by contacting your 21st CCLC state evaluation team.

**Communicating the program’s commitment to inclusion.** Having a written inclusion policy for your program can reassure families that their children will be welcome and supported when they enroll in a 21st CCLC program, regardless of whether they have a disability. It also signals the importance of inclusion to people who work in the program, such as college-age students, certified teachers, paraprofessionals, community volunteers and community partners. These individuals may have diverse backgrounds and a range of experiences with regard to inclusion. A statement about the role of inclusion in the program can help keep everyone on the same page.

A written policy can also help the program maintain consistent communication about inclusion throughout the hiring process. For example, you might explain during interviews, “We include students with and without disabilities in all aspects of the program. We work with the school-day educators and the family to find out what the students need. Then we put accommodations into place to make sure students succeed in the 21st CCLC program.” Or you might say, “Sometimes we modify a practice to better fit the program or the student. Can you talk about a time you had to tweak something to make it better fit the environment or an individual student?” Orientation sessions for staff, volunteers and partners can also help to communicate inclusion as a priority.

Community partners also need to know about your commitment to inclusion. You might wish to share policies regarding student confidentiality. For example, you could explain to partners that the program does not disclose any student’s disability or diagnosis or share an IEP without written permission from the family.

**Providing training and professional development.** Consider including all program staff members, volunteers and community partners in trainings to support inclusion in the 21st CCLC program. In the Wareham Public Schools Community, Academic, Recreation and Enrichment (CARE) programs in Massachusetts, all staff, including bus drivers, receive training in universal design for learning, an approach that emphasizes activities and environments that



can be accessed by all students, with and without disabilities. Regular staff training, such as the monthly staff trainings on youth development and behavior management offered by Girls Inc. of Alameda County in California, can help to support inclusion.

**Engaging families to support inclusion.** Effective two-way communication can build trust between students’ families and program staff and provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and information. Ongoing family engagement can help program staff get to know students’ strengths, challenges and interests. It can also empower families and caregivers as advocates for students with disabilities.

**Working with schools and districts to support inclusion.** School and district special education departments can help identify students with disabilities who might especially benefit from participating in your program. Some of these students might have individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans in place for the school day. The information and accommodations described in those plans can be useful in the 21st CCLC environment — and sometimes, program staff can provide ideas and suggestions for helping students succeed in the school setting.

When the inclusive vision of the afterschool program aligns with that of the school or larger community, all students benefit. Gardner Pilot Academy in Massachusetts is an example of such alignment. Gardner is a full inclusion school, which means it does not use a pull-out model or self-contained classrooms for students with disabilities. All services are provided in the classroom, where every grade level has a learning specialist who is dual-certified in English language learners and special education, according to Lauren Fogarty, Director of Extended Services. To promote the culture of inclusion embedded into the school and the afterschool program, the 21st CCLC leadership team meets with partners before they start working at the site and provides orientation information on the school, safety and emergency procedures, expectations, how to reach out for support, how to make connections, and how to report problems or make suggestions.

### **Think About It** **Setting the Stage for Inclusion**

*In each area listed below, which of your program's current policies and practices help to ensure student access, participation and support? What improvements might you make?*

- ★ Student enrollment
- ★ Hiring
- ★ Training and professional development
- ★ Family, school and community engagement

The orientation session acquaints partners with the philosophy and policies of the school, and gives them a chance to ask questions.



# Using Self-Assessment to Address Special Needs and the Whole Child

New Jersey School Age Care Coalition (NJSACC)

NJSACC, the statewide afterschool network for New Jersey, created the New Jersey Quality Standards for Afterschool (NJQSA) with funding from the Charles S. Mott Foundation and the state department of education. These standards provide guidance in seven key areas, including special needs and the whole child. They are accompanied by self-assessment tools that enable program administrators to determine whether their program activities are engaging all learners, and whether the program and staff members are addressing students' social-emotional well-being. The tools can be used by anyone, including administrators, staff, caregivers and (with modifications) students. Our goal is for programs to complete the self-assessment tools at least twice a year: once in the fall to identify areas of need and later in the year to determine progress on self-selected goals. The NJQSA also includes an action planning tool and links to resources in identified areas of need. The standards, along with the self-assessment tool and related resources, help programs address special needs, meet the needs of the whole child and provide high-quality experiences for all students.

**Addressing individual needs and engaging all learners.** It is important to ensure that all students are able to access materials and spaces and participate in all program activities. Using multiple learning strategies can enable students to participate in a variety of ways, though some students might need differentiated supports and accommodations. Activities that offer opportunities for social and emotional development are important to students' individual growth and development. Adding or strengthening these elements in your program can benefit all students.

## Assessing the Quality of Inclusion in Your Program

It is important to stay informed about your state's 21st CCLC evaluation requirements, including those relevant to inclusion. Usually, the state's evaluation goes beyond compliance to include elements of quality such as implementation of best practices and program outcomes. The state coordinator or your 21st CCLC state evaluation team can provide specific information about what information will be collected (such as basic

data on enrollment and attendance), what program elements will be assessed, and how evaluation findings can be used to improve the quality of inclusion. Utah, for example, is discussing the addition of inclusion-focused indicators in the Utah Afterschool Program Quality Assessment and Improvement Tool. In New Jersey, the state coordinator can elect to invite specialists from the special education department to participate in monitoring visits.

Although external monitoring and evaluation serve important purposes, self-assessment at the program or site level can be a powerful tool for identifying strengths and challenges, reflecting on strategies and outcomes, and spurring professional growth among staff. You can also use self-assessment results for planning purposes. For example, you might decide to collaborate with partners in the school district and the community to increase support for students with disabilities or to provide staff training on inclusion. The checklist at the end of this guide describes three tools you can use to develop quality indicators related to inclusion for the purpose of self-assessment.

## Introduction to Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs

# Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (With Selected Resources)

### Create a Vision for Inclusion and a Plan for Sharing It

- **Develop a written statement on inclusion.** Make it as brief or as detailed as you wish to communicate your program's vision for inclusion. You might write a sentence about the concept of inclusion (e.g., "We welcome youth of all ability levels and strive to meet their needs.") and add another sentence or two about its defining features (access, participation and support). Or you might write a detailed statement that explicitly encourages participation by students with disabilities. See the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies tip sheet at <https://ccids.umaine.edu/files/2014/02/admiss-providers-tip-022714.pdf> for ideas.
- **Plan to communicate your vision for inclusion in a variety of ways.**
  - **Family and community outreach.** Use plain language in outreach materials and make sure the text and images reflect ability differences and diversity. Enlist the help of parents, high school or college students, and volunteers to prepare program information sheets and other materials in different languages for families with English learners. Invite parents to tour the program with their child and make them feel welcome and comfortable with the program environment. Make sure your community partners know about your commitment to inclusion.
  - **Student recruitment.** Share program information with special education teachers. Enlist enrolled students as program ambassadors and ask them to help recruit new students, including those with disabilities. Address inclusion in registration forms and written policies and procedures.
  - **Employee and volunteer materials.** Use your written statement on inclusion in job announcements, application forms for employees and volunteers, interviews, and training materials. For example, you might include the following statement as a job responsibility: "Collaborate with a team to create and implement accommodations for students who need extra support."
  - **Social media.** If you have a program website, Facebook page, Twitter account, blog or online newsletter, use these vehicles to tell readers how your program includes students with disabilities. Take care, though, to honor policies and family wishes about student privacy.

### Identify Indicators of Quality for Inclusion

- **Programming to provide student access, participation and support:**
  - **Make sure your program meets federal and state requirements.** Familiarize yourself with the federal and state laws related to inclusion and disabilities. (For more information, see topic guide 2, "Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need to Know.") Also review the language in your state's RFP and monitoring plan, and learn about the state's 21st CCLC evaluation requirements and process.
  - **Set the stage for inclusive practices at the program and site levels.** See topic guide 3, "Establishing Inclusive Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines."
  - **Identify or provide professional development opportunities** in inclusion for program staff. See topic guide 4, "Training and Developing Staff to Support Inclusion."

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## Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (continued)

- **Leveraging partnerships to provide student access, participation and support:**
  - **Work with state and local partners.** See topic guide 5, “Identifying and Developing Partnerships.”
  - **Engage families and communities.** See topic guide 6, “Engaging Families and Communities to Support Inclusion.”
  - **Work with schools and districts.** See topic guide 7, “Working With Schools and Districts to Support Inclusion.”
- **Engaging students by providing access, participation and support:**
  - **Build on existing plans to accommodate individual student needs.** See topic guide 8, “Working With IEPs, Section 504 Plans and Transition Plans.”
  - **Plan for differentiated supports that take into account individual student needs, strengths and interests.** See topic guide 9, “Addressing Individual Needs and Engaging All Learners.”
  - **Support students’ social and emotional learning.** Recognize student behaviors as forms of communication, facilitate positive peer interactions, and co-create expectations and agreements with students. See topic guide 10, “Supporting Social-Emotional Learning.”

## Assess the Quality of Inclusion in Your Program

- **Consider using the tools listed below to self-assess your program on quality indicators related to including students with disabilities and identify areas for improvement:**
  - **Essential Best Practices in Inclusive Schools** (by Jorgenson and colleagues, National Center on Inclusive Education): available for download at <http://www.iodbookstore.org/products/Essential-Best-Practices-in-Inclusive-Schools.html>
  - **Quality Indicators for Inclusive Building Based Practices** (by the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education): [http://www.mcie.org/usermedia/application/8/quality\\_indicators\\_-\\_building\\_based\\_practices\\_2011.pdf](http://www.mcie.org/usermedia/application/8/quality_indicators_-_building_based_practices_2011.pdf)
  - **California Before and After School Program Site Inclusion Quality Self-Assessment Tool:** [http://www.californiaafterschool.org/articles/Inclusion\\_Quality.pdf](http://www.californiaafterschool.org/articles/Inclusion_Quality.pdf)
- Based on the results of the self-assessment, select one or two areas for improvement and use the quick-start tools below to develop a plan for addressing them.

## Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (continued)

### Quick-Start Checklist and Action Planning Form

This checklist and the action planning form on the following page can help you use the *Lessons From the Field* guides on inclusion to examine and improve program policies and practices. Here are some ways you might use these tools:

- ★ To identify program strengths, areas of need, and next steps for including students with disabilities.
- ★ To identify relevant professional development needs and opportunities.
- ★ To identify specific strategies to include and support the students you serve.
- ★ To spark discussion and brainstorming about the information and ideas in the guides.

### Quick-Start Checklist

- **Download the U.S. Department of Education’s 10 topic-focused *Lessons From the Field* guides on inclusion in 21st CCLC programs.** The topics are listed earlier in this guide and also at the end of the accompanying action planning form. The guides are available from your state coordinator and also from the You for Youth website at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.
- **Review the guides purposefully.** Make notes on your program’s strengths. Also note improvements you would like to make in your program.

*Program strengths:*

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*Areas in need of improvement:*

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- **Identify one priority for improvement, based on your review of the guides, and use the action planning form on the next page to help your staff develop an action plan.** For the best results, focus on one or two priorities at a time; consult colleagues, families, school-day teachers, partners and community members as appropriate; adjust your strategies as needed to achieve the results you want; and make inclusion-related priorities part of your regular meeting agenda.

## Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (continued)

# Quick-Start Action Planning Form for Inclusive Programming in 21st Century Community Learning Centers

Improvement priority:

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(e.g., improve supports for social-emotional learning)

What we want to change:

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(e.g., develop activities that enable students to identify their own body signals and strengthen self-regulation)

Action Step (describe strategy)	Who will do it? (assign tasks)	Which <i>Lessons From the Field</i> guide(s) will inform this step?*	When will we do this? (create timetable)
<b>1.</b> (e.g., Poll staff to determine their confidence level in developing activities to strengthen self-regulation.)			
<b>2.</b> (e.g., Search for professional development opportunities or other resources on building social-emotional skills.)			
<b>3.</b> (e.g., Discuss how to apply what was learned through professional development and other resources to your program.)			

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## Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (continued)

Action Step (describe strategy)	Who will do it? (assign tasks)	Which <i>Lessons From the Field</i> guide(s) will inform this step?*	When will we do this? (create timetable)
<b>4.</b> (e.g., Support staff to design small-group activities to introduce the concept of self-regulation to students and to provide ongoing guidance to help students cope with challenges.)			
* Topics: 1–Intro to Inclusion; 2–Legal Foundations; 3–Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines; 4–Staff Training and Development; 5–Partnerships; 6–Families and Communities; 7–Schools and Districts; 8–IEPs, Section 504, Transition to Adult Life; 9–Individual Needs and Engaging All Learners; 10–Social-Emotional Learning. All <i>Lessons From the Field</i> guides on inclusion are available at <a href="https://y4y.ed.gov">https://y4y.ed.gov</a> .			



YOU FOR YOUTH

**Interested in checklists on other inclusion topics?** All *Lessons From the Field* topical guides on inclusion contain checklists like this one. The guides are available at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> T. Alquraini and D. Gut, “Critical Components of Successful Inclusion of Students With Severe Disabilities: Literature Review,” *International Journal of Special Education* 27, no. 1 (2012): 42–59.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and U.S. Department of Education, *Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children With Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs* (Washington, DC: U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, September 14, 2015), <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>.

This publication was produced under U.S. Department of Education Contract No. ED-ESE-13-C-0071 with Leed Management Consulting, Inc. (LMCi). The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service or enterprise mentioned in this publication is intended or should be inferred.

Contributors include Alfred Vitale and Jennifer Lapointe (LMCi); Anna Luther, Alissa Marotto, Kathryn King and Mary Shea (Kids Included Together); and Sherri Lauver, Nancy Balow, Miranda Cairns and Carla McClure (Synergy Enterprises, Inc.).

### Suggested Citation

U.S. Department of Education. “Introduction to Inclusion in 21st CCLC Programs (Topic Guide 1).” *Lessons From the Field: Serving All Students, Including Students With Disabilities*. 2016. Available at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.