



21st Century Community Learning Centers

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



Topic Guide 3

Establishing Inclusive Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines

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

- ✓ Modify physical spaces to improve student access, participation and support.
- ✓ Make activities and materials inclusive.
- ✓ Establish consistent routines.

Tools in this guide include...

- ✓ An action planning checklist, with links to selected resources.

Site-Based Elements of an Inclusive Environment

The defining features of an inclusive program environment that accepts human differences are student access, participation and support. This guide addresses basic site-level elements of an inclusive environment: physical spaces, activities, materials and routines that accommodate individual needs.¹

Developing Inclusive Physical Spaces

Ensuring that all students in your program have physical access to transportation, facilities, activities and social interactions promotes feelings of belonging, equality and connectedness.²

Having all students ride the same bus during a field trip, for example, can foster an inclusive environment in other aspects of your program. Identifying and securing appropriate transportation is an issue site coordinators might want to discuss with program directors. Some schools and districts, such as the Wareham Public School District in Massachusetts, consider transportation to 21st CCLC programs when they plan their budgets, and program directors can take such arrangements into consideration.



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>.

The arrangement of furniture, rugs and materials within the program space can support or hinder students' access and participation. Here are some ideas to consider: Divide available space into clearly defined activity areas to help students use each area comfortably and productively. Make sure the size of the space matches the way it will be used: large, open spaces are required for group activities, whereas small nooks can work well for activities with two or three participants. Small traffic cones can be used to adjust the size of a play area. Place materials and supplies where they can be easily accessed by every student. Remember to maintain a clear line of sight for supervision. Play on a court instead of grass for easier mobility if someone uses a wheelchair. When possible, provide a quiet area, or "Chill Zone," where students can go when they feel overstimulated by the noise or activity level.

If you have control of your physical space, you may want to look for resources to make it compliant with the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. For example, the community-based Historic Scott School Arts and Community Center in Utah secured supplemental funds from the county to make the site ADA compliant. Adding a ramp and accessible doors made the program space accessible for all students and families.

Many 21st CCLC programs share space with other programs or organizations. This is especially true for school-based programs. It takes careful planning to temporarily transform the space from a classroom, cafeteria or gymnasium to an afterschool environment. Here are some ideas for making the transformation fast and easy: Store materials in bins or rolling carts that can be easily pulled out of closets. Consider what can be added to a space to meet the needs of individual youth, such as a sun shade if the area is too bright. Identify objects that can be removed, such as rocks on a field, to improve mobility for a wheelchair. Roll up carpets or store other soft items such as bean bag chairs during the times when individual or small-group activities require more space. Use trifold display boards, which are light and portable, to hang students' art work and to create borders between different activity areas.

Making Activities and Materials Inclusive

Strategically selecting teaching approaches, activities and materials can foster inclusion and participation for all students. For example, project-based learning encourages students to tackle authentic problems and

Story From the Field

What "Makes or Breaks" an Experience for Students With Disabilities

Tia Holmes, Youth Leader, I am Norm campaign

I have been fortunate to find camps and afterschool activities that are very inclusive. The Mountain Retreat and Learning Center in Highlands, North Carolina, for example, runs summer programs with well-trained staff. The campers and staff are all super respectful of everyone there. The cabin I stayed in was wheelchair accessible. All hikes and camp activities offered different levels, so I always felt I could fully participate, whether it was field time or lake play. The staff worked with me to ensure I was able to navigate the dining hall, camp and excursions safely without feeling isolated or "different." I also had to do self-advocacy so that I felt I wasn't being shadowed or babysat. For example, my counselor would just casually say, "Hey, Tia, can I grab you a drink while I'm up there?" Also I felt comfortable helping my peers to help me buckle my life jacket or scoop out the food from the buffet line. The Mountain Retreat was something I looked forward to each summer. The 12 days and nights went by too fast, and I always wanted to return. I am very grateful I was able to have such a positive experience!

gives them control over what and how they learn.³ This instructional approach naturally provides a variety of options for student participation, so it's a great way to engage students of diverse interests and abilities.

Students with disabilities should be encouraged to participate with the rest of the group whenever possible. If a child is not participating in an activity, it is helpful to determine why. Does the student understand the directions? Does the student understand his or her role in the game? Is the environment having an impact on participation? Does the child simply want to do something else? Do the supports or accommodations match the goal of the activity? For example, if the goal is teamwork and communication, be sure the students have a shared method of communication. Addressing these concerns could lead to greater participation.

Sometimes, a student who is not participating in an activity might need a simple accommodation. For example, a staff member at Gardner Pilot Academy in Boston said one student had difficulty sitting still and paying attention during group activities on the carpet. However, when she allowed him to use a fidget toy during this time, he was able to calm down and participate.

Having alternative activities available can be helpful at times. For example, at a Hayward Unified School District program, a staff member noticed that a student was sitting out during a structured recess activity. The staff member talked with the student and learned that he did not like the games the other students were playing, and the student was allowed to jump rope instead. This option enabled his active participation during recess.

There are many ways to adapt materials so that all students can participate in an activity. The solution might be as simple as using larger game pieces, using images and pictures to accompany text, or providing grip supports for paintbrushes. Materials such as bubbles, Mad Libs™ and stress balls can be incorporated into activities — or used individually when students need a break. Joke and trivia books, iPods with music and

Think About It

Listening to Students

Tia Holmes, who helped create the national I Am Norm campaign as a youth, says the key to quality inclusion is open and honest communication between the program director and the student (and sometimes the parents). Here are a few tips from Tia. Which ideas might help make your program more inclusive?

- ★ Identify students' needs, and prepare staff to provide specific modifications and accommodations to meet those needs.
- ★ Balance accommodations with opportunities for independence and safe exploration. While it's not possible to eliminate every situation that might be negative for an individual with a disability, it is important to plan alternate activities (open to all participants, of course). Forced inclusion isn't fun for anyone.
- ★ Don't be afraid to ask the student or the student's parents about specific concerns. It is better for everyone if uncomfortable situations can be avoided or reduced. The more I communicated with my peers, the staff and the director, the better the overall experience was.

headphones, and paper and markers can also be offered during “down time.”

Consider creating a “bag of tricks” filled with alternative activities, fidget toys and other materials you can easily move from one program environment to another to support student participation or provide a break. Include items that have multiple uses. For example, a stress ball can keep busy hands calm, and can also be soothing to a student who is frustrated. You might label some materials, put them within reach of those who need them, and store them where everyone knows how to find them. Materials that are used infrequently can be put out of sight or out of reach. For example, you probably want to remove jump ropes from the homework area.

Establishing Consistent Routines

No matter how well a 21st CCLC program aligns with the school day, there are important differences between the two settings. When students move from the school day to the 21st CCLC environment, they might be moving from one physical space to another and from one set of routines and expectations to another.³ Establishing predictable routines within your program, and being consistent from day to day, can ease the transition and have a positive effect on the way students experience the program. Especially for students who need a sense of control, knowing “what’s next” and what’s expected of them throughout their time in your program can reduce anxiety. Depicting routine activities on visual schedules and posting them in a visible spot can provide direction and reassurance for all students.

Following a routine does not mean eliminating variety or doing the same thing every day. However, routines for getting started, transitioning between activities,

giving instructions, cleaning up at the end of each day, and communicating with families can anchor a wide variety of program activities. For example, at 21st CCLC program sites in Wareham, Massachusetts, different programming is offered in Monday/Wednesday sessions and Tuesday/Thursday sessions, and students can choose from three different activities during each two-day block. Some of the activities are things students have suggested when surveyed.

In fact, establishing a routine process for soliciting and incorporating student feedback, and striking a balance between student- and adult-led activities, ensures opportunities for student voice and choice. The afterschool program at Gardner Pilot Academy has students vote on activities and projects, then take on various roles and responsibilities. At the Kearns Junior High program in Salt Lake City, students on an afterschool committee decide what topics will be offered, and students can choose which nine-week block to attend.

Story From the Field

Helping Students With Disabilities Transition to High School

Mark Emery, Administrator, After-School Programs, Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia

Our 21st CCLC summer programs have been very effective. One component is a one-week high school transition program for rising ninth-graders who are English learners or recipients of special education services. We partnered with the school, and teams of teachers, administrators, counselors and students created a structure to help freshmen navigate this significant transition successfully and start their high school experience on a positive note.

The high school transition program focuses on two difficult aspects: academic work and social organizational changes. Activities demonstrate the realities of the high school experience, dispel myths, and answer questions so students know what to expect and can plan for academic success. Accelerated literacy and math workshops focus on improving writing and math skills. Other sessions focus on learning styles, study skills, time management and goal setting. Panels of administrators, counselors, teachers and students lead discussions and field questions about curriculum, scheduling, expectations, academic pathways, discipline, athletics and extracurricular activities. A scavenger hunt helps students become acclimated to the building. Student ambassadors from the high school establish personal connections, act as mentors to younger students, and make presentations to middle school students and their families.

The goal is to help incoming freshmen develop a sense of connection, gain social competencies and increase their ability to adapt to changing environments — all of which can impact academic success.

A Routine for Incorporating Student Choice and Voice

Jan Van der Beek, Site Coordinator, Kearns Junior High School, Salt Lake City, Utah

During my seven years as the afterschool coordinator, we have used trial and error to come up with classes and activities the students will like. We get their input on what they want to do. The students brainstorm ideas as part of an afterschool committee, and some students also share ideas with me individually. We want our classes to be good learning experiences that students enjoy and get something out of. All classes are connected to state academic standards. If there is a cooking class, we work on math; even bowling can be a great learning experience. We offer each class for a quarter (about nine weeks). We start promoting the classes two weeks before a quarter ends so students can choose which class they want to sign up for next. If a student realizes a class isn't the best fit, there is wiggle room to choose a different class. School-day teachers are hired to lead some classes. Right now we have a longboard-making class that the woodshop teacher runs. We are lucky that our county has found grants to help pay for materials and for teachers' time.



Establishing Inclusive Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines

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

Develop Inclusive Physical Spaces

- **Examine the program environment and identify simple improvements.**
 - Are all spaces (e.g., classroom, stage, gym, outdoors) and materials accessible to the students you serve?
 - Are the light and noise levels too low or too high, especially for students who are sensitive to these environmental elements?
 - Is there enough room for students to participate comfortably?
 - Is there a quiet area (“Chill Zone”) students can access if they need to take a break?
- **Confirm that facilities, places and organizations associated with your program comply with disability and civil rights laws.** Program directors can explore county and local resources for supporting people with disabilities and creating *ADA*-compliant spaces. Program leaders can examine field trip sites to identify potential barriers that might affect a student’s experience and participation, then work with the site to ensure that accommodations can be made. See topic guide 2, “Legal Foundations of Inclusion: What You Need to Know.”
- **Plan for transportation that meets the needs of all students.** Consider leasing an accessible van, purchasing transportation services or finding alternative transportation.

Make Activities and Materials Inclusive

- **Create a bag of tricks that includes everyday items to be used as accommodations.** For example, include calming items (fidget toys, stuffed animals, Silly Putty™), visual accommodations (portable picture schedules, a first/then board), sensory supports (sunglasses, hats, ear plugs) and a towel that can be placed on the floor in a corner to define a quiet area.
- **Use inclusive approaches to learning.** Learn to give students different ways to participate in activities and help them collaborate with peers. Consider universal design for learning and project-based learning; find out more about the latter in the Project-Based Learning course on the You for Youth website (<https://y4y.ed.gov>).
- **Adapt equipment and materials.** Check with parents and teachers about borrowing adaptive equipment:
 - Use balls that are large, soft or easy to grip if some students have difficulty holding or grasping balls.
 - Use balls with jingle bells or bright colors for students who are visually impaired.
 - Use pencil grips or clipboards with an inclined surface for easier writing.
 - Use a tablet, such as an iPad or Kindle, with communication apps.
- **Adjust the time allotted for an activity:**
 - **Allow extra time** to complete a game, a task within in a game or a transition.
 - **Reduce the amount of time students participate if extended play is difficult for them.** Consider using a timer for a student who has difficulty playing an entire game, and encourage the student to play until the timer rings. Extend the amount of participation time gradually to increase the student’s capacity.

Establish Consistent Routines

- **Create a large visual schedule.** ConnectABILITY has a free templates and photo library you can use. Or you and your students can take photos of various activities such as outdoor play, snack time and music time to customize the schedule. Post the schedule in a visible spot in your program area, and also send it home to help families become familiar with the schedule so they can ask questions and reinforce routines.
<http://connectability.ca/visuals-engine>

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Action Planning Checklist for 21st CCLC Programs (continued)

- **Review any changes in routine more than once.** You might discuss changes with students the day before the change and again at the start of the program so they are prepared.
- **Establish standard processes for students and families to provide input and feedback on program activities and procedures.** Students are more likely to participate in activities that match their preferences, skills and interests. Interest surveys, student committees and group processes can help students identify activities they would like to try, continue or stop. Families of students with disabilities can also provide valuable ideas about ways to improve access and participation. A planner for brainstorming is available on the You for Youth website (<https://y4y.ed.gov>) under “Click & Go 1.”



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

¹ C. Dukes and P. Lamar-Dukes, “Inclusion by Design: Engineering Inclusive Practices in Secondary Schools,” *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41, no. 3 (2009): 16–23.

² J. McLesky and N. L. Waldron, “Making Differences Ordinary in Inclusive Classrooms,” *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42, no. 3 (2007): 162–68.

³ B. Barron and L. Darling-Hammond, *Powerful Learning: Studies Show Deep Understanding Derives From Collaborative Methods* (2008, October), available from Edutopia at <http://www.edutopia.org/inquiry-project-learning-research>; and J. Schwalm and K. S. Tylek, “Systemwide Implementation of Project-Based Learning: The Philadelphia Approach,” *Afterschool Matters*, Spring 2012, 1–8.

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.

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Suggested Citation

U.S. Department of Education. “Establishing Inclusive Spaces, Activities, Materials and Routines (Topic Guide 3).” *Lessons From the Field: Serving All Students, Including Students With Disabilities*. 2016. Available at <https://y4y.ed.gov>.