Keys to Successful Early Childhood Inclusion

Parents and professionals across the Commonwealth met in local forums to discuss ways to increase inclusive opportunities for our youngest children and create communities where all belong. They identified these Keys to Successful Inclusive Practices:

1. **Communication**

   - Find time and ways to communicate across agencies and collaborate to support children.
   - Create different ways to ensure that communication with families matches individual families' own styles and preferences (email, phone calls, notes).
   - Value and use joint planning time across agencies.
   - Use communication tools (email, notebooks, websites, logs) not just with families but with all involved in children's lives.

2. **Training**

   - Provide joint training across roles (early intervention staff, early care and education providers, parents). It's cost efficient and will promote collaboration around inclusion.
   - Plan for onsite followup/carryover after training to demonstrate how to include children successfully.
   - Allow time for transition planning for children, families, and professionals.
   - Include trainings or town meetings for the general community.

3. **Commitment/Attitudes**

   - Gain support from leadership. This is critical.
   - Focus on the positive strengths of programs and children.
   - Have realistic expectations and be flexible. Start small – one child or one program at a time.
   - Model an "I Can" optimistic point of view.
   - Examine your own attitude. Inclusion is about acceptance.
   - Focus on skills in relationship-building.

4. **Resources**

- Do an inventory. Do you have appropriate resources?
  If you do, don't forget to share.
- Be aware of available funds (including grants).
- Utilize grant money to pay for substitutes, planning time, and transportation.
- Use resources like Keystone Stars to increase financial resources for staff.
- Know and use all available expertise (local and state).

5. **Higher Education**

- Contact your local colleges and offer student-teaching placements.
- Encourage your local colleges to always place student teachers in inclusive settings.
- Partner with colleges for inservice trainings.
- Link training to college credits.

6. **Policies**

- Create a common understanding of the different program regulations. Knowledge of systems and laws helps programs appreciate each other's strengths and constraints.
- Plan carefully for transitions across systems. Don't forget to involve school districts.
- Avoid unnecessary transitions. If a child is already in a neighborhood child care program, support him or her there.
- Put practices in writing through interagency agreements.

7. **Parent Involvement**

- Work with parents to create sharable and transportable child portfolios—especially for transition.
- Build and use parent-professional teams. Everyone has a role in supporting children in inclusive settings.
- Promote confidence-building in families so they can meet the needs of their children and help them develop.
- Model inclusion by including parents in your planning, implementation, and evaluation of inclusion.

8. **Program Measurement/Evaluation**

- Continually evaluate if the children are learning and making friends. Inclusion alone is not enough.
- Use interagency child evaluation methods to avoid over-evaluation when children are in multiple programs.
- Use the expertise from both childcare and early intervention to build the best program for all children.

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