



Transforming Early Childhood Leadership Institute (TECLI)

Presented by:

Dr. Tiffany Beer & Dr. Mykel Brooks

About TECLI

- TECLI focuses on the professional learning needs of school and district leaders and teachers in instructional leadership at the Pre-K through Grade 3 level.
- Studies examining the quality of education in the years following preschool have revealed that the academic benefits of preschool are sustained when children subsequently attend a high-quality elementary school.
- A coordinated system is necessary, which includes alignment of teaching practices, classroom environment, curriculum, and assessment that meet the developmental needs of young learners. Additionally, teaching and learning must be rooted in equity-centered and developmentally appropriate practices.



Rahway's Involvement

The district applied to be a part of the initiative and was selected by the NJPSA-FEA to be involved in this 4-part series.

Our district team:

Dr. Tiffany Beer, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Dr. Mykel Brooks, Director of Early Childhood Education

Dr. Dion Patterson, Principal

Ms. Stephanie Holobinko, Program Supervisor ELA K-6

Ms. Anjanette Highsmith, Program Supervisor Math/Science K-6

Ms. Tiffany Cykowski, Pre-K teacher

Ms. Sarah Jencsik, 2nd Grade teacher

Ms. Tiffany Variello, 3rd Grade teacher

Ms. Ashley Gray, District Coach

Ms. Christine Garcia Mendoza, Preschool Provider Education Coordinator (RDCC)



Goals of Participation

Outcomes that we hope to achieve by participating are:

1. Increased communication across grade levels (Preschool through Grade 3);
2. Increased district policies around Preschool to Grade 3 alignment in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and
3. Increased knowledge of and implementation of the NJDOE early childhood implementation guidelines





Rahway Preschool Inclusion

*A 3-Part Presentation on
NJPIEP, Inclusion Initiative, & State Inclusion Study*

Presented by:

Mr. Larry Abramowitz, Dr. Mykel Brooks, Mr. James Fisher, & Mrs. Tara Kopec

New Jersey Preschool Inclusive Education Project (NJPIEP)



About NJPIEP

- A collaborative effort between the New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE), the Montclair State University Center for Autism and Early Childhood Mental Health (CAECMH), and the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education (NJCIE).
- The design is for collaborators to partner with public, charter, and vocational schools to provide Technical Assistance and Systemic Change Facilitation to develop more inclusive educational opportunities.



Our Involvement

- Applied Spring 2020; Rahway was one of 15 districts chosen for the Technical Assistance Program.
- In Spring 2021, focus centered on integrating related services into the preschool classrooms. Provided training to Child Study Team, Related Service Providers, and Administrators.
- Applied for Systemic Change Facilitation in Spring 2021; We were granted the opportunity and began our work in Fall 2021. Currently in year 4 with our partnership which provides coaching to initiate changes in our preschool program toward an inclusive model. Year 2025-2026 will be the culminating year with NJPIEP, at which time Rahway will be considered to be a model district site.



Outcomes of Our Involvement

- Biweekly inclusion PLC meetings
- Alignment of Teaching Strategies Gold and IEP goals to streamline progress monitoring
- Training on Universal Design for Learning, integrating related services into the classroom, differentiation, IEP goal writing, and other pertinent topics provided
- Direct collaboration with other districts implementing inclusion practices (visits, virtual meets, Community of Practice meetings)
- Monthly Systems Based Leadership team meetings with Rahway staff (administrators, CST, teachers, & related service providers)
- Successfully integrated approximately 25 special education preschool students into the general education program to date



Rahway Pre-K Inclusion Initiative





Guiding Principles

A ***least restrictive environment (LRE)*** is a principle that ensures students with disabilities are educated in a setting that best meets their needs, alongside their peers without disabilities. LRE is a core concept of the ***Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)***, a U.S. special education law.

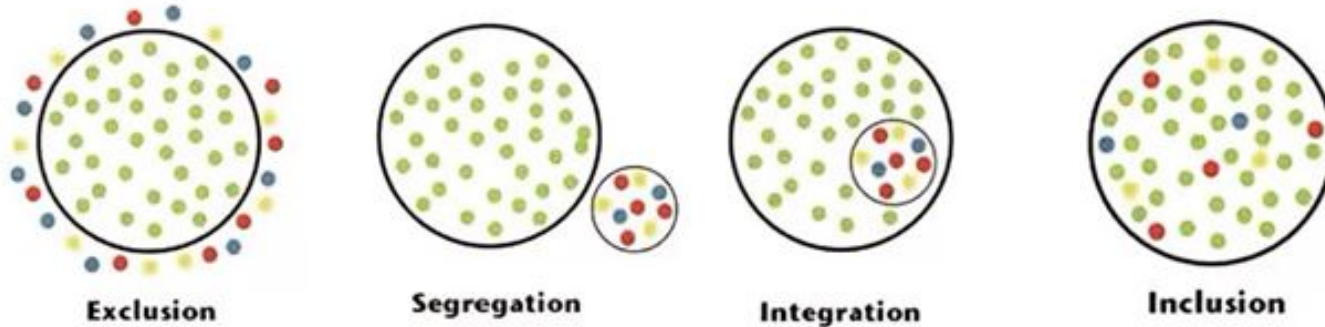
Implications:

- Students with disabilities should be educated in general education classrooms with their peers as much as possible
- Students should only be removed from a general education classroom if supplemental aids and services are not enough to help them learn
- Schools should consider providing services in the general education classroom or other integrated settings

What is Inclusion?

Inclusion in the classroom means that all students have equal access to educational opportunities and are valued, respected, and safe. It also involves supporting students with disabilities so they can access the general education curriculum and be held to the same expectations as their peers.

Evolution of Inclusion



Facts on Preschool Inclusion



- Inclusion benefits children with and without disabilities
- The individual outcomes of preschool inclusion should be access, membership, participation, friendships, and support.
- Children with disabilities do not need to be “ready” to be included. Programs need to be “ready” to support all children.



Early Childhood Inclusion: A Joint Position Statement of
the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

Our Research & Development

State Conferences

- Preschool Inclusion Leadership Conferences (NJPIEP / MSU)
- NJDOE Preschool Conferences / Trainings

Curriculum Presentations

Visits to NJPIEP Demonstration Site - Belleville, NJ

- June 2, 2023 - Admin
- April 30, 2024 - Admin, Teachers, & CST Members
- November 1, 2024 - Admin & Coaches



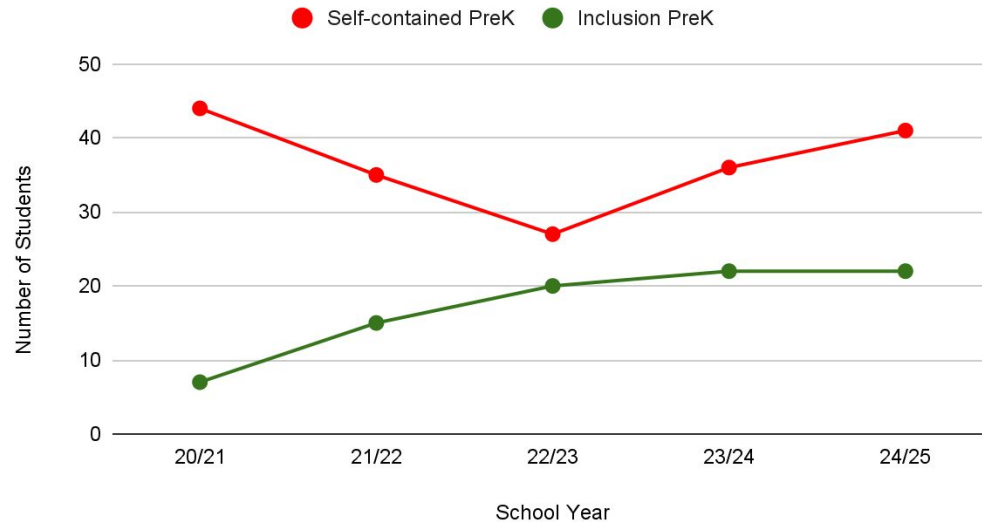
History of Preschool Program Options in Rahway

- Prior to 2018-2019 (Preschool Expansion Grant), severely and moderately disabled preschoolers were educated primarily in our self-contained classes. There were limited inclusion opportunities.
 - The district had NO general education Pre-K programming for 3 year olds.
 - The district had NO full-day programming for General Education Pre-K.
 - 4-year old general education students were limited to half-day.
- After several years of experience and expansion of the Pre-K program, the district has the capacity to further support Special Education students in general education classrooms.



Furthering Our District Goals

Special Education Preschool Enrollment as of 10/15



Notes:

While overall efforts of inclusion in general education classes have improved, we have seen a rise in self-contained numbers.



Current Program Options

ABA PSD



Non-ABA PSD (DAISY)



General Education

Pre-K

Self-Contained

1:2 Ratio

Max 6-8 students

ABA Principles

Self-Contained

1:4 Ratio

Max 12 students

General Education

1 teacher, 1 aide

Max 15 students



Proposed Program Options

ABA PSD

Self-Contained

1:2 Ratio

Max 6-8 students

ABA Principles



General Education Pre-K

General Education

1 teacher, 1 aide

Max 15 students



Why make this change?

- Fostering inclusion
- Promoting best practices in education
- Reducing self-contained numbers
- Setting our youngest learners up for success
- Creating high expectations for every child to reach their full potential
- This initiative is consistent with the research and training we have received and reviewed.



Federal / State Guidance

- *“A high-quality early childhood program is, in part, one that is inclusive, culturally and linguistically responsive and provides a sense of belonging for all children and their families.”*

(pg. 4 of the [Federal Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, US HHS and US DOE, Nov. 2023](#))

- The NJDOE recognizes the importance of inclusion for all students and supports the natural proportion of students with IEPs in the general education classroom setting (*2-3 students per class*).



How does this change impact our Pre-K program?

- We already have students with IEPs included w/in our classes
- More students with IEPs incorporated into classrooms
 - More seats will need to be held for students with disabilities
- Teachers & paraprofessionals would need to learn and be exposed to additional strategies to specifically support diverse learning needs
- Aligns with Early Childhood Education Department goals
 - Including adding an additional PEA funded class



Elements of Our Pre-K Program

- Appropriate furniture & equipment
- Range of learning materials & supplies: open ended, varied abilities
- Differentiated, individualized instruction
- Visuals and labels
- Safe & nurturing environments
- Adult-child interactions
- Opportunities for social interaction
- Consistent daily routine and child-friendly schedule
- Family engagement and participation opportunities
- Student assessment and progress monitoring



Supports Already in Place / Progress

- Professional development on inclusive practices & curriculum implementation
- Use of PLCs to support classroom instruction
- Purchasing of Creative Curriculum for self-contained classes
- Alignment of self-contained and general education classroom environments
- Meetings with staff to discuss implementation



Supports Needed for Successful Implementation

1. Additional paraprofessional support for general education classes
 2. Special Education Early Childhood Coach
 3. BCBA support
 4. Professional Development
 - a. Summer Institute
 - b. Trainings & workshops
 - c. Peer observations & demonstration site visits
 5. Related Services Providers, Push-In Model
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- Mindset & Expectations
 - (Funding for new items mostly provided through existing positions in local budget & PEA funding!)



NJDOE / NIEER Preschool Inclusion Study



About the Inclusion Study

- The NJDOE is collaborating with the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) to conduct a research study designed to gather information about district inclusion policies and practices in publicly funded preschool classrooms. **The purpose of the study is to assess the experiences of preschool students with disabilities who are in inclusive settings.**
- Rahway was selected to participate as a PEA Cohort 1 district. 7 of our 26 classrooms were randomly selected for the observation.
- Researchers conducted 3-hour classroom observations, including teacher interviews. Observations took place in October & November 2024.



Anticipated Research Findings

The tool measures 12 areas to assess whether the needs of students with disabilities are being met in inclusive settings. Areas include:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Adaptations of space and materials/equipment | 7. Support for communication |
| 2. Adult involvement in peer interactions | 8. Adaptation of group activities |
| 3. Adults' guidance of children's activities and play | 9. Transitions between activities |
| 4. Conflict resolution | 10. Feedback |
| 5. Membership | 11. Family-professional partnerships |
| 6. Relationships between adults and children | 12. Monitoring children's learning |

Full district report is expected to be released in March 2025.



Conclusion



Furthering Our District Mission

With diversity, equity, and inclusion as our strength, the Rahway Public School community shall implement culturally sustaining, *student-centered* programs to *address the unique needs of all students*. Students are empowered to take ownership of their learning in order to become *successful global citizens* who are inspired to achieve their highest potential.



"Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."



- Henry Ford