

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES:

*A Guide to Understanding
Early Childhood Special Education Systems*



DEVELOPED BY THE

RACE 2 K

*Maximizing results for preschool children
with disabilities because kindergarten is too late.*

Funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education
and a project of the Parent Information Center

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Introduction

Administrator involvement in day to day operations of their district's preschool programming varies greatly across the state. As more and more focus is being put on Early Childhood Education both on the state and federal level, Special Education and other district and building level Administrators are realizing the need to better understand preschool and the requirements as it relates to serving preschool aged children with disabilities. The US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the New Hampshire Department of Education (NH DOE) have a strong commitment to ensuring that preschool children with disabilities are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that children are educated in an Early Childhood setting and removed to other settings only when the nature and severity of the child's disability is such that, even with supplemental aids and services, their needs cannot be met in the Early Childhood setting. As with school aged children, school districts are required to ensure access to a continuum of alternative learning environments for preschoolers. For some districts, ensuring access to Early Childhood programs means collaborating with community Early Childhood and preschool programs. For some districts, this means expanding district operated program models to include Early Childhood classrooms.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide was developed by the Race 2K project to provide a general overview of preschool in the context of ensuring preschool children with disabilities have access to the Least Restrictive Environment. In addition, it also provides tools and strategies to help Administrators better understand and examine their district's system for providing services to preschool aged children with disabilities. The guide is divided into several sections.

- *Examining Where Services Are Provided to Preschool Children with Disabilities* - In this first section we discuss the terminology, and provide clarification around the settings and environments related to serving preschool aged children with disabilities. This section includes a program self-assessment.
- *Understanding Your District's Preschool System* - In the second section information is provided to support conversations between Administrators and Preschool staff around the components and qualities of the district's preschool system including classroom types, service delivery models and quality components. This section includes a rubric to help document a district's preschool system.
- *Expanding Your District Operated Preschool Program* – The third section discusses how a district can expand their district operated preschool program to meet the increasing number of preschool aged children with disabilities and/or to include Early Childhood classrooms. This section includes a checklist to help explore capacity for expansion.

This guide is intended to be used as a tool for school districts to reflect on the capacity and characteristics of their own programs and/or classrooms. The Rubrics and other tools included are to help Administrators and Preschool program staff examine and discuss their program's characteristics and components. It is suggested that Administrators and Preschool program staff meet to discuss the questions raised and complete the Rubrics and/or tools together. It is important to remember that this Guide and its tools are not designed to "evaluate" a program but rather to generate discussion about the characteristics of the program and the capacity of a district to meet the needs of children with disabilities within the LRE.

PRESCHOOL DATA ELEMENTS

As part of the State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report (SPP/APR) the NH DOE monitors districts on their performance on 14 Indicators. Indicators 6, 7 and 12 are specific to the education of preschool age students with disabilities. These are important aspects of preschool special education administration Administrators should know about.

Indicator 6 – Preschool LRE

Percent of children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs attending a:

- A. Regular Early Childhood program and receiving the majority of special education and related services in the Regular Early Childhood program; and
- B. Separate Special Education class, separate school or residential facility.

Indicator 6 data is collected via the NH Special Education Information System (NHSEIS). For more information on how to ensure your district is correctly entering the required data for Indicator 6 please visit: http://www.picnh.org/settingsmodule/presentation_html5.html

Indicator 7 – Preschool Outcomes Measurement System (POMS)

Percent of preschool children aged 3 through 5 with IEPs who demonstrate improved:

- A. Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships);
- B. Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy); and
- C. Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.

Districts utilize either AEPSi or My Teaching Strategies to assess children and gather the required data for POMS.

Indicator 12 – Early Transitions

Percent of children referred by Part C prior to age 3, who are found eligible for Part B, and who have an IEP developed and implemented by their third birthdays. Data for Indicator 12 is collected via NHSEIS.

Services for infants and toddlers and preschool aged children with disabilities are provided under the same federal law – the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA is divided into sections or parts. Part C provides services for children birth through age 2 and is known in NH as Family Centered Early Supports and Services (FCESS). Area Agencies are responsible for providing FCESS. Some provide services directly, others use contracted vendors to provide services and some use vendors and provide services directly.

The IDEA and NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities requires that all children referred by FCESS have eligibility determined prior to age 3, and if eligible for special education, an IEP developed and signed by the child's third birthday. In addition, the NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities requires every school district to have an Interagency Agreement with their local Area Agency. These Interagency Agreements lay out the roles and responsibilities as well as the timelines for the early transition process. The Race2K project is funded by the Bureau of Special Education to support the implementation of the Interagency Agreements. You can find your regional Interagency Agreement on the Race2K website along with more information on the early transition process including Tip Sheets and an on-line learning module. <https://race2k.org/transitions/>

SUPPORT TO DISTRICTS

The Race2K project is funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education to assist school districts in their efforts to support preschool aged children with disabilities. Project staff are available to assist school districts in both assessing current preschool program models and capacity and in implementing strategies to expand their program to provide access to Early Childhood classrooms/programs. For more information on the Race 2K project or to request technical assistance please visit www.race2k.org.

Examining Where Services are Provided to Preschool Children with Disabilities

The language and terms used to describe district preschool programming can often be confusing. It is not uncommon to hear terms such as “integrated preschool” or “inclusive preschool” to describe a district’s preschool program. When a district says, “We have an integrated preschool”, what does that actually mean? These terms are not used or defined in the IDEA or NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities. It is important that a common understanding of the educational settings and programs being providing our preschool population is developed. Below we will discuss the settings and environments in more detail.

At the end of this section you will find a *Preschool Program Self-Assessment*. It is intended to provide a snap shot of your district’s program. Administrators may complete the self-assessment independently to help them conceptualize what is discussed in this section. Administrators may also choose to meet with Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district’s preschool program to discuss the questions and complete the Self-Assessment together. It is important to remember that this Guide and tools are not designed to “evaluate” a program but rather to generate discussion about the characteristics of the program and the capacity of a school district.

EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS/ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN AGED 3-5

As part of developing the IEP, the IEP Team must determine the location or “setting” where each special education and related service will be provided. When we hear the word setting, we frequently jump to placement or the program where the child will be going. People are sometimes confused by the concepts of a setting or environment versus a placement. A setting is the generic category; the type of place. The program is the placement, the actual place, with a name and a specific curriculum, staffing, etc. As an example, you would like to go out to eat. You’d really like Mexican food (the setting). Now you are trying to decide between two restaurants - Hermanos or Margaritas (the placement).

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the US DOE defines three different types of educational settings/environments for children aged 3-5 which align with the NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities:

- **Regular Early Childhood Setting** (listed in NHSEIS as 3-5 Early Childhood Program)
- **Special Education Settings** (listed in NHSEIS as 3-5 Special Education Classrooms, 3-5 Separate School, and 3-5 Residential Facility)
- **Other** (neither a regular Early Childhood setting nor a special education setting. Listed in NHSEIS as 3-5 Homebased/Child’s Home or 3-5 Service Provider Location)

REGULAR EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTING

In the school aged context, the Early Childhood environment/setting would be equivalent to the Regular Education Environment (aka the regular first grade classroom). An Early Childhood setting is defined as having at least 50% of children without IEPs. In other words, at least half of the class will always be children who are not identified for special education. Programs associated with this setting include but are not limited to programs in these categories:

- Head Start
- Preschool classes offered by the public school system
- Private preschools (Community Preschool Programs)
- Family Child Care or other Child Care Center

SPECIAL EDUCATION SETTINGS

Early Childhood Special Education Program

In school aged context, this would be similar to self-contained programs or specially designed classrooms. An Early Childhood Special Education classroom is defined as having less than 50% of the children without IEPs. In other words, the majority of the children in the classroom are children with disabilities. It is operated by the local school district and can include, but is not limited to Special Education classrooms in regular school buildings, trailers or portables outside the regular school building.

Separate schools

A separate school is defined as a publicly or privately operated separate day school facility designed specifically for children with disabilities.

Residential programs

A residential facility is a publicly or privately operated residential school or residential medical facility on an inpatient basis.

OTHER SETTINGS

Home

A preschooler with a disability may receive some or all of their special education and related services in the child's home. Home is defined as the principal residence of the child's family or caregivers. The term caregivers includes babysitters.

Service Provider Location

Service provider location is defined as receiving special education and/or related services such as speech therapy in a:

- Therapist or clinician's office in a public school
- Private therapist or clinician's office
- Hospitals facilities in an outpatient basis

Unlike with school-aged children, Service Provider Location is an appropriate setting in NHSEIS for preschool aged children. A child may require speech therapy, but not a preschool program. In this case, services may be provided by a speech pathologist individually or in a small group at a site such as a speech room in a local elementary school, or in a district preschool classroom after hours.

CONTINUUM OF PRESCHOOL PLACEMENTS (ENVIRONMENTS)

It is important to remember that settings drive placement and that settings and placement are determined based on a child's individual needs and not on the pre-established service delivery model of the district. When developing the IEP, the IEP Team decides what special education and related services the child requires and the setting in which the services will be provided starting with the Early Childhood setting. Keeping LRE in mind, the settings in which services will be provided then drives the preschool placement. Even when options seem limited, program placement must be determined by what is necessary to meet the child's needs.

The NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities defines the continuum of Preschool Placements. In terms of district operated classrooms we will discuss two:

Early Childhood Classrooms

An Early Childhood setting/classroom is defined as having at least 50% of children without IEPs. In other words, at least half of the class will always be children who are not identified for special education. Early Childhood classrooms include district operated classrooms or community Early Childhood programs. Early Childhood classrooms do not have program approval from the NH DOE, Bureau of Special Education. This is because the NH DOE does not have authority or approve Early Childhood classrooms. Additionally, because district operated programs are exempt from child care licensing there are no state level requirements for maximum class size, teacher certification or staff to student ratio.

Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms

An Early Childhood Special Education classroom is defined as having less than 50% of the children without IEPs. In other words, the majority of the children in the classroom are children with disabilities. These classrooms require program approval from the NH DOE. The maximum number of preschool children in an Early Childhood Special Education classroom is twelve. For a classroom with only one qualified teacher and no paraprofessional, the maximum number of preschool children is eight. For a classroom of 8 – 12 preschoolers, staff requirements include one qualified teacher and one qualified paraprofessional or two qualified teachers. Early Childhood Special Education classrooms must be staffed as outlined in the NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities.

It is important to remember that program approval is classroom specific, and does not apply to the entire Preschool Program. There may come a time when children are not assigned to an approved Early Childhood Special Education classroom. If an approved Early Childhood Special Education program is no longer being utilized, district Administrators should contact the NH DOE to discuss options and potentially close the program in NHSEIS.

OPTIONS FOR PROVIDING ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTS

While the continuum of placements is defined clearly, how a school district provides access to Early Childhood environments can be different. Some districts partner with community preschool programs exclusively to provide Early Childhood environments for all of their district preschoolers. Some school districts operate their own Early Childhood classrooms/programs. Others partner with community preschool programs along with operating their own district preschool programs to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE). There can be multiple classrooms, offering Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education within one school district. One size does not fit all. The priority is on offering access to a full continuum of settings and environments and having a clear understanding of what your school district's options are and how each fits in the continuum of environments.

The Race2K Project has created a guide to support school districts explore community preschool options called the ***Supporting Children with Disabilities: A Guide to Working Together for School Districts and Community Preschool Programs***. This Guide discusses characteristics and components of preschool/childcare programs that are necessary to consider when meeting the needs of children with disabilities. There are three components to the Guide, including the Program Profile, identifying key characteristics of a preschool/childcare program; Program Rubric, which provides a means to generate discussion about program characteristics and capacity; and Formalization, which guides the coordination and formalization of the working relationship between districts and community childcares and preschools. While the Guide was not developed to assess a program's quality, the guide does draw heavily on the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices for quality Early Childhood programs. Thus, the Guide can also be used as a tool for a school district to reflect on the characteristics of their own Early Childhood programs/ classrooms. The Guide can be viewed and downloaded at <https://race2k.org/lre/supporting-children-with-disabilities-a-guide/>

Preschool Program Self-Assessment

This Self-Assessment is intended to provide a snap shot of a district's program. Administrators (and Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district's preschool program) may complete the self-assessment independently to help them conceptualize what is discussed in the *Examining Where Services Are Provided to Preschool Children with Disabilities* section and then meet to discuss their responses in more detail. Administrators may also choose to meet with Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district's preschool program to discuss the questions and complete the Self-Assessment together. Included in the Rubric is a space for Explanation/Comments to capture specific information or criteria. It is important to remember that this Guide and tools are not designed to "evaluate" a program but rather to generate discussion about the characteristics of the program and the capacity of a school district.

PROGRAM NAME:

DATE:

PERSONS COMPLETING SELF-ASSESSMENT:

DISTRICT OPERATED CLASSROOMS - IDENTIFY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH DISTRICT OPERATED CLASSROOM (ADD COLUMNS AS NECESSARY)

	Classroom 1	Classroom 2	Classroom 3	Classroom 4
Classroom setting (Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education)				
Classroom has program approval from the NH DOE				
Age-ranges				
Total enrollment limit for each classroom				
Teaching credentials/certifications for in each of the district operated classrooms				
Staff to student ratio				
Ratio of identified to non-identified children				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

PRESCHOOL SETTING/ENVIRONMENT OPTIONS

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
The district has access to the continuum of settings and environments (Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education)				
The district provides services in a Service Provider location for identified children who only require related services to receive a free appropriate public education				
There is a plan for when the capacity is reached within a district operated classroom to ensure access to LRE				
There is a plan for when the capacity is reached within the district operated program as a whole to ensure access to LRE				
If the district partners with community programs to offer Early Childhood programs there are written contracts or agreements that lay out roles and responsibilities, including maximum numbers of children and service delivery partners with community programs				

Notes/Possible Next Steps:

Understanding Your District's Preschool System

In order to move forward in efforts to increase access to Least Restrictive Environment for preschool aged children, school districts need to examine their preschool systems. It is important to remember that in many districts preschool itself is much like its own “school”, meaning there are multiple classrooms or placement options within the program. It is suggested that Administrators meet with Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district's preschool program to discuss the questions raised below to identify the key components of their system. At the end of this section you will find the *Understanding Your District's Preschool System Rubric* that can be completed by the Administrator and Preschool Coordinator (or others) to document the district's preschool system. The characteristics and discussion questions are not meant to be all-inclusive lists, but rather practices that need to be considered. Depending upon the district, there may be additional characteristics to consider.

DISTRICT OPERATED CLASSROOMS

As a reminder, an Early Childhood setting/classroom is defined as having at least 50% of children without IEPs. However, it is the district's decision to set the actual ratio while keeping the minimum standard. In other words, a district could decide to enroll, for instance, 60% of the students without disabilities, while enrolling 40% identified for special education. While actual classroom enrollment may vary at any given time during the school year, it is important for districts to consider their ratio standards and maintain those ratios throughout the year. Early Childhood classrooms do not have program approval from the NH DOE, Bureau of Special Education and school districts are exempt from child care licensing.

If a classroom has program approval from the NH DOE, Bureau of Special Education, it is considered an Early Childhood Special Education program.

- How many preschool classrooms do you operate?
- What setting does each classroom correspond to? (Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education) How many are Early Childhood? How many are Early Childhood Special Education?
- Do any of your classrooms have program approval from the NH DOE?
- What is the target ratio of each Early Childhood classroom?
- Do you have children without disabilities in your Early Childhood Special Education classrooms? What is the rationale?

Classroom Age Range

Regardless of whether a classroom is Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education, classrooms may be dedicated to students of a specific age (i.e. 3 year old classrooms and 4 year old classrooms), or be multi-age (mixed ages).

- What are the age-ranges of each classroom?
- What was the reasoning behind this decision?

Classroom Enrollment Size

Early Childhood classrooms have no required cap on the number of children. Individual school districts determine their own classroom size for Early Childhood classrooms. These classroom sizes should be consistent with school district policies related to class size for K-2. Early Childhood Special Education classrooms are capped at twelve children per classroom, with a minimum of two adults in the room. Regardless of whether children without disabilities are included in Early Childhood Special Education classrooms the total number of children remains 12.

- What is the total enrollment limit for each classroom?
- What factors do you consider in making these enrollment limits?

Teacher Certification

Because the NH DOE does not have oversight of Early Childhood classrooms and school districts are exempt from child care licensing, there are no certification requirements for teachers in Early Childhood classrooms. Like class size, districts set their own certification requirements for teachers in Early Childhood classrooms. Teachers for Early Childhood Special Education Classrooms must meet the certification requirements outlined in the NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities.

- What teaching credentials/certifications do the teachers have in each of the district operated classrooms?
- Do they match the requirements per classroom designations (Early Childhood Special Education or Early Childhood)?
- Does the program have the requisite teacher certifications as needed for the IEP Team meetings?

Staff to Student Ratio

As with teacher certification, there is no state required staff to student ratio for Early Childhood classrooms. Districts need to consider the unique needs of their children when determine staffing levels, and should be consistent with school district policies for K-2. Early Childhood Special Education classrooms must be staffed as outlined in the NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities.

- Does the Early Childhood Special Education classroom(s) have appropriate staff to student ratios?
- What is the staff to student ratio in the Early Childhood classroom(s)? How was this staffing pattern determined?

PRESCHOOL SETTING/ENVIRONMENT OPTIONS

Districts are required to ensure that all children with disabilities, including preschool aged children, have access to the continuum of alternate learning environments and placements.

- How does your district ensure access to the continuum of settings and environments (Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education)?
- Does your district provide services in a Service Provider location only?
- What is the total number of children your program has capacity for? (For both children with and without disabilities)
- What does the district do when that capacity is reached (within individual classrooms and the program as a whole)?
- If your district partners with community programs are there written contracts or agreements that lay out roles and responsibilities, including maximum numbers of children and service delivery? (For more information, please see Race2K's publication *Partnering with Community Programs Guide*)

BASELINE PROGRAM

We know that for 1st graders, the regular education program is 6 hours a day, 5 days a week. We build on that the additional services and supports children with disabilities require for a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The same premise holds true for preschool aged children.

- What is the “regular education” (baseline) preschool program?
- Is it different depending upon the age of the child?
- How was a baseline established in your district? Have you considered how this baseline compares to the district's kindergarten program?
- How are the number of hours/days of programming determined for a child with a disability?
- What are the days, times, hours being offered by community preschools/child cares in your area? How does that compare to what the district operates?

ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Districts have a variety of processes for enrolling children without disabilities in their preschool programs. This is often an over-looked process that is critical when districts operate Early Childhood classrooms/programs.

- How are students chosen to be enrolled as non-identified students? Is there a waitlist or a screening process?
- How do you market your program? Do you have a marketing plan that includes timelines and materials needed?
- What is the process for enrolling non-identified children? Is this process documented?
- If you charge tuition for children without disabilities, who oversees the referral and tuition collection?
- Who manages the enrollment process for children without disabilities?
- At what age are non-identified children able to enroll? Are they accepted year round as they turn 3 or must they wait to enroll in September after turning 3? (Similar to a Kindergarten enrollment procedure)

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

Service delivery models should match the needs of the children. Some districts employ related service personnel, such as Occupational Therapists and Speech Pathologists, strictly to provide the service hours necessary to meet the children's needs as dictated in the IEP. Other districts use a model of integrating related service personnel into the preschool classroom and all activities. Others use a combination of both direct service and integrating within the classroom.

- How are services provided to your preschool children? Why are they provided this way?
- Are children removed from the classroom, as in a “pull out model” or are services provided within the classroom?
- Are services provided individually in the classroom, through small group curriculum activities or both?
- What are your Service Provider certifications? Are they appropriately and adequately certified?
- Are you using Service Provider location setting to provide specialized instruction?

CURRICULUM

A variety of curricula and evidence based practices exist to meet the needs of young children in a preschool setting. Some curricula, such as Creative Curriculum, are all encompassing and take into consideration the whole child's developmental skills. Other curricula may target individual skill areas, such as Handwriting Without Tears or Lively Letters. Some use the Early Childhood component of the districts K-I curriculum to address their preschool curriculum needs. For whichever Early Childhood curriculum or evidence based practices a district chooses to incorporate into their program, it will be important to provide all program staff with training and professional development opportunities to learn how to use the curriculum effectively across disciplines within the classroom. It is important to remember that curriculum is necessary to address and guide the development of the whole child. Consider social/emotional, motor and speech/language development, as well as cognitive development when choosing a curriculum or curricula.

- Which curricula does your program utilize?
- Are your curricula evidence based?
- How are curricula used in program planning?
- How often are curriculums reviewed and evaluated?
- Are all preschool staff involved in professional development activities pertaining to the program's curricula?

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Another often overlooked area in preschool coordination is the administrative aspects of the preschool program. Who oversees preschool within a district is important to ensure that the program has sufficient resources and support to run smoothly and provide a quality preschool program.

- Who handles referrals in your district for preschool?
- Who oversees the day to day operations?
- Who is responsible for overseeing and assuring program quality?
- Who is responsible for teacher oversight/evaluation?
- Who is the LEA in IEP meetings?
- Who is responsible for POMS (Preschool Outcomes Measurement System)?
- Who attends the Interagency Agreement meeting and works with Early Supports and Services (ESS) to ensure smooth and compliant transitions?
- Who is responsible for the general paperwork of running the program? Is there a preschool administrative assistant assigned or is this the teacher's responsibility?
- Who is responsible for overseeing preschool services and programming in general?
- If community placements are used, who monitors the effectiveness and appropriateness of the program?
- How are building level administrators involved in the preschool program?

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Family engagement at the preschool level is extremely important, whether you are providing an Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education program as research has demonstrated it is critical for student success. Family involvement takes place naturally through the IEP process.

- How are families involved in your preschool program?
- Do the families of non-identified children receive the same communications as the families of children with disabilities, such as progress reports, parent/teacher conferences, etc.?
- Is there a mechanism for on-going home-school communication?
- Does the district have a family handbook for your preschool program?
- Does your program provide information to families about how they can support their child's learning at home?

DATA COLLECTION/PROGRESS REPORTING

For most district preschool programs, the collection of data and reporting of progress happens automatically through IEPs and the Preschool Outcome Measurement System (POMS). Many districts collect data on all of their preschoolers through checklists and more formalized screening tools. Many districts also conduct POMS evaluations on all of their preschoolers, although this is not a requirement of the NH DOE.

- How is data collected in your program?
- What data is collected in your program?
- How is data shared with staff?
- How is data shared with families?
- How is data collected for progress reporting in individual IEPs?
- How is data used for to inform program design and improvement?
- Has the district examined their Indicator 6 data? What does it tell you about the program?
- Is POMS data used to inform the program?

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

Through the process of examining your district's preschool system concerns, unknowns or areas for improvement may be identified. When a district wants to work to address these areas, Implementation Science (a research based framework for system change) tells us that we need some specific structures in place to enable this to happen. Specifically, a Leadership Team is needed to coordinate and drive the work.

SUPPORT TO DISTRICTS TO EXAMINE PRESCHOOL SYSTEMS

The Race2K project is funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education to assist school districts in their efforts to support preschool aged children with disabilities. Project staff are available to assist school districts in both assessing current preschool program models and capacity and in implementing strategies to expand program to access to Early Childhood classrooms/programs. For more information on the Race 2K project or to request technical assistance please visit www.race2k.org

Understanding Your District's Preschool System Rubric

It is suggested that Administrators meet with Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district's preschool program to discuss the questions raised in the *Understanding Your District's Preschool System* section of the Guide and then use this Rubric to document the district's preschool system. The meeting to complete the Rubric typically takes about 1.5 hours. The characteristics and discussion questions are not meant to be all-inclusive lists, but rather practices that need to be considered. Depending upon the district, there may be additional characteristics to consider. Included in the Rubric is a space for Explanation/Comments to capture specific information or criteria as well as a place to capture potential next steps. It is important to remember that this Guide and tools are not designed to "evaluate" a program but rather to generate discussion about the characteristics of the program and the capacity of a school district. As a reminder, Race2K is also available to assist you in discussing and completing this Rubric should you feel you need assistance.

DATE:

PERSONS COMPLETING RUBRIC:

DISTRICT OPERATED CLASSROOMS - IDENTIFY THE CHARACTERISTICS OF EACH DISTRICT OPERATED CLASSROOM (ADD COLUMNS AS NECESSARY)

	Classroom 1	Classroom 2	Classroom 3	Classroom 4
Classroom setting (Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education)				
Classroom has program approval from the NH DOE				
Age-ranges in each classroom				
Total enrollment limit for each classroom				
Teaching credentials/certifications of staff in each of the district operated classrooms				
Staff to student ratio				
Ratio of identified to non-identified students				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

DISTRICT OPERATED CLASSROOMS CONTINUED

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
All classroom design, staffing and ratios match their program approval status				
Teacher credentials match the requirements per classroom designations in all classrooms				
The program has the requisite teacher certifications as needed for the IEP Team				
The district has written policies regarding classroom enrollment limits for Early Childhood classrooms				
The district has written policies regarding staff to student ratios in Early Childhood classrooms				
The target ratio for each Early Childhood classroom. What is it?				
Early Childhood classrooms maintain their ratios at all times during the school year				
Both Early Childhood & Early Childhood Special Education classrooms maintain their class enrollment limits at all times during the school year				
Children without disabilities are placed in district operated Early Childhood Special Education classrooms. If so, why?				
There is a plan for when ratios reach their maximum to provide programming for additional children eligible for special education. If so, what is it?				

Notes/Possible Next Steps:

PRESCHOOL SETTING/ENVIRONMENT OPTIONS

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
The district has access to the continuum of settings and environments (Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education)				
The district provides services in a Service Provider location for identified children who only require related services to receive a free appropriate public education				
There is a plan for when the capacity is reached within classrooms to ensure access to LRE				
There a plan for when the capacity is reached within the program as a whole to ensure access to LRE				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

BASELINE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
There is an established “regular education” preschool program.				
There is a baseline program for 3 year old programming.				
There is a baseline program for 4 year old programming.				
There is process to determine the number of days/hours of programming determined for a child with a disability requires. If so, specify				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN WITHOUT DISABILITIES

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
The district has a marketing plan for recruiting non-identified peers.				
The district has a process for enrolling non-identified students in the program				
There is someone who manages the enrollment process for children without disabilities. Who?				
If appropriate, the district has a written procedure regarding tuition				
If appropriate, the district has a written procedure regarding tuition assistance or scholarships				
If appropriate, the district has a written procedure regarding who is responsible for tuition collection				
The district has procedures in place regarding when during the year non-identified students are able to enroll				

Notes/Possible Next Steps:

SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/ Comments
Services are provided to your preschool children in a variety of ways.				
Children are removed from the classroom, as in a “pull out model”				
Services are provided within the context of the classroom				
Services are provided individually in the classroom, through small group curriculum activities or both				
Service Providers are appropriately certified				
The district provides services in a Service Provider location for identified children who only require related services to receive a free appropriate public education				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

CURRICULUM

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/ Comments
The program utilizes a curriculum. Which curriculum(s) does your program utilize? Are they evidence based?				
Curriculums are used in program planning. How?				
Curriculums are reviewed and evaluated. How often?				
All preschool staff are trained in all curriculums				
All preschool staff are involved in on-going professional development activities pertaining to the program's curriculum				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
The preschool program has a written mission and/or vision statement				
There is a designated person to handle referrals in your district for preschool. Who?				
There is someone who oversees the day to day operations of the preschool classroom(s). Who?				
There is someone responsible for overseeing and assuring program quality. Who?				
There is someone responsible for teacher oversight/evaluation. Who?				
There is someone designated as the Preschool LEA representative. Who?				
There is a designated person responsible for POMS (Preschool Outcomes Measurement System). Who?				
There is someone designated to attend the Interagency Agreement meeting and works with Early Supports (ESS) and Services to ensure smooth and compliant transitions. Who?				
There is a designated person who is responsible for the general paperwork of running the program Who?				

ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE (CONTINUED)

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
If community placements are used, there designated staff to provide services in the programs. Who/what providers?				
If community placements are used, there is a designated case manager for those students. Who?				
If community placements are used, there is a designated person who monitors the effectiveness and appropriateness of the program. Who?				
If community placements are used, there are written contracts or agreements that lay out the tuition agreements, roles and responsibilities, including maximum numbers of children and service delivery partners				
There is a communication system established between preschool administration and building level administration				

Notes/Possible Next Steps:

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
Families are involved in your preschool program. How?				
There are processes in place to engage all families, both those with and without disabilities				
All families within the program receive the same types of communication, progress reports, etc.				
There is a mechanism for on-going home-school communication.				
The district has a handbook for the preschool program				

Notes/Possible Next Steps:

DATA COLLECTION/PROGRESS REPORTING

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
Program and child specific data is collected in the program. In what manner?				
Program and child data is shared with staff. How?				
Child data is shared with families? How?				
There is a process for collecting data for progress reporting in individual IEPs				
Data is used for program design and improvement. How?				
Indicator 6 data is reviewed on a regular basis to inform program growth				
POMS data is used to inform program design and structure				
Notes/Possible Next Steps:				

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
The district has established a Leadership Team that has a broad representation of stakeholders.				
The Leadership Team has administrative support. Administrator attends meetings and trainings, is active in problem-solving to ensure the success of the work.				
The Leadership Team has regular meetings. Team meetings are scheduled at least 1x per month for a minimum of 1 hour. Team member attendance is consistent.				
The Leadership Team has established written mission/purpose that team members are able to clearly communicate.				
The Leadership Team develops a written action plan that includes all critical elements and guides the work of the team. Action steps are identified to ensure achievement of the goals. The team reviews the plan and updates their progress at each meeting.				
The Leadership Team reviews and revises the plan at least annually				
Staff are aware of and supportive of the need for program growth. How has staff buy-in been assessed?				

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT (CONTINUED)

	No/No Evidence	Somewhat/Partial Evidence	Yes/Evident	Evidence/Comments
A feedback and communication loop has been established. Staff input and feedback is obtained throughout the process and the Leadership team provides update to stakeholders on a regular basis.				

Notes/Possible Next Steps:

Expanding Your District Operated Preschool Program

As discussed earlier, school districts have a variety of ways to ensure access to the continuum of settings and environments. In some districts, the numbers of preschool aged children being identified are forcing districts to revisit their preschool model as a whole to ensure they can meet the growing number and needs of children. For many districts, the decision to open an Early Childhood classroom (or an additional classroom) seems to be an easy answer to address the issue of providing access to an Early Childhood setting. But there are a variety of factors that must be considered when growing your preschool program. These factors go beyond simply the fiscal impact of adding staff and materials or whether or not the district has the physical space to grow. There are also infrastructure components that must be considered to ensure the district has the capacity to grow. At the end of this section is an *Expansion Capacity Checklist*. It is suggested that Administrators meet with Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district's preschool program to discuss the questions raised below and complete the Checklist together. It is important to remember that this Guide and tools are not designed to "evaluate" a program but rather to generate discussion about the characteristics of the program and the capacity of a school district.

REVISITING CURRENT PROGRAM STRUCTURES

Before thinking about opening another classroom, could program expansion be possible by revisiting current district program structures such as:

Classroom Age Ranges

There are several options to address the age ranges a district can establish for preschool classrooms (regardless of whether they are Early Childhood or Early Childhood Special Education classrooms). Classrooms may be designed for specific ages (i.e. 3 year old classrooms and 4 year old classrooms). Multi-age classrooms may provide for flexibility in keeping the numbers of students equalized. In some communities, families have preferences for age groupings and this may need to be given consideration in order to enroll non-identified peers. Multi-age versus age specific classrooms may also be a philosophical decision. The age ranges of a classroom may also be affected by how many physical preschool classrooms are available in the district. In the case of larger districts, a variety of types of classrooms may be offered, whereas in smaller districts, multi-aged classrooms may provide for more flexibility. Remember that the types of classrooms provided by a district may vary from year to year depending on the number and ages of preschoolers.

- Could expansion be possible by changing the age grouping/design of classrooms?

Classroom Enrollment Size

Early Childhood classrooms have no maximum enrollment requirements. The maximum number of students in an Early Childhood classroom is a district decision. Physical space and staffing needs should be considered when deciding class enrollment numbers. An additional consideration for districts is the ratio of children with disabilities to non-identified children. The Early Childhood setting distinction dictates that the classroom may have no more than 50% of the children with disabilities; it is the district's decision to set the actual ratio while keeping the minimum standards. In other words, a

district could decide to enroll, for instance, 60% of the students without disabilities, while enrolling 40% with special needs. While actual classroom enrollment may vary at any given time during the school year, it is important for districts to consider their ratio standards and strive to maintain those ratios throughout the year. Early Childhood Special Education classrooms are capped at a maximum of twelve children per classroom.

- Do we need to look at our class enrollment limits? Can they be changed?
- Can we change our ratio?
- Is there a waiting list of non-identified children to enroll to maintain appropriate ratios if more identified children are enrolled?

Baseline Program

We know that for 1st graders, the regular education program is 6 hours a day, 5 days a week. Otherwise known as a free adequate public education. For children identified for special education we build onto that the additional supports, services, etc. that a child needs in order to receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Similarly, we need to establish what the regular education preschool program for children without disabilities is. As discussed in previous sections, the baseline program varies greatly from one district to another. A district's baseline program may be impacted by the size of the district, number of children they serve as well as what is consistent with what is offered in community preschool programs.

Remember, the child's needs and IEP will drive the number of hours/days required to meet FAPE for any individual child identified with a disability. Just as every child's needs are different, their preschool schedule may be different. Some children may require a two day per week program to meet their needs and some children may require a five day per week program to meet their needs, while other children may require a full day program.

Districts throughout NH establish preschool program models based on the individual needs of their preschoolers as well as the needs of the district. Just as community preschool/childcare programs offer unique schedules for their families that should be the case for school districts. If program expansion is necessary, consider the following:

- How many additional sessions will be required to meet the district's growing needs?
- How will adding an extra day of programming to an already existing two or three day per week program impact the need?

Community Early Childhood Program Options

When looking at expanding current program options within a district, one option may be placement of some children in a community Early Childhood program. Community programs can be as different as district programs, and may bring their own set of unique strengths and challenges. Related service staffing and financial commitment are among the considerations. As a district, it may be beneficial to be proactive, by becoming familiar with preschool programs in the community so that if it becomes necessary to place children in a community setting the district is already familiar with available programs. Please see Race2K's **Supporting Children with Disabilities: A Guide to Working Together for School Districts and Community Preschool Programs** for strategies and tools to help when talking with and exploring community programs.

EXPLORING CAPACITY FOR EXPANSION

Many factors can contribute to a district considering expansion of their preschool programming options, including an increase in the number of children requiring special education, desire for more local control over programming and ensuring children are able to access Early Childhood programs. The first step when considering expansion is to explore and evaluate your district's capacity for possible expansion. It will be important to consider the short and long term implications in terms of finance, space and personnel.

Fiscal

In NH, services for preschool aged children is only required for those identified as eligible for special education. However, school districts are responsible for ensuring access to LRE. Growing your preschool program may mean more children or paying for children in community placements. Regardless, this may mean increased cost.

- How is our current preschool programming funded?
- Are we currently spending our entire Federal 619 allotment?
- Do we have access to additional funding to pay for staff, staff training, materials or space?
- Are there any other grant opportunities that are appropriate for preschool?
- Are there any opportunities to leverage funds such as Title I?
- Is charging tuition for non-identified children an option to consider? If so, how would that be factored into our preschool budget?
- In expanding, how will transportation be impacted? Will it be a barrier for families?

Space Needs

When considering expanding a district program, space needs should be examined. For many districts, classroom space is a challenge. Most often, preschool classrooms are housed in an elementary school. However, districts throughout the state have also become creative in addressing space issues by housing preschool classrooms in local high schools, CTE centers and community early learning centers. If there are classroom location options available within a school building, bathroom availability or proximity should be considered. Drop off and pick up locations and playground space should also be considered, in terms of proximity to the classroom, as well as size and safety factors. However, a benefit to classrooms located within another school building includes the possible use of school amenities such as the library and gym.

- Is additional classroom space available within the current program space?
- Is classroom space for expansion available in another school district building (another elementary building, for example, or might space be available within the high school or CTE)?
- If there is space in another location, is the space appropriate for preschool aged children? (i.e. bathrooms, playgrounds) If not, what would it take to make it appropriate?
- How might the program be impacted if there are classrooms in multiple locations?

Staffing

When considering any expansion within a preschool program, a district must consider staffing and staffing patterns. In addition to determining numbers of teachers and paraprofessionals (both in terms of certification and student/teacher ratio), districts will need to consider the related Service Providers necessary to meet the children's IEP needs.

- Do we have a sufficient number of teaching staff with appropriate certifications?
- How will program growth impact the service delivery model?
- Will additional staff be required? Who? What types, qualifications/certifications?
- Do we have appropriate Administrative support or structures in place to manage additional classrooms and children?
- How will we ensure teachers have the requisite amount of planning time?

OPENING A DISTRICT OPERATED EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

Districts tend to just jump into the logistics when considering moving towards opening a district operated Early Childhood classroom(s). Where will the class be? How many students? Who will the paras be? But before that, the district needs to ensure that it has a vision and mission for the preschool program as a whole. Opening an Early Childhood classroom(s) includes a philosophy shift from including a few non-identified children in special education classroom, to developing Early Childhood classrooms for all children and providing additional support when necessary to meet the needs of a child with disabilities.

Your Program's Identity –Mission and Vision

- Is preschool a separate program? Is it integrated as part of an elementary school? Does it have an identity of its own?
- Does your program have an identity beyond being a program for preschool aged children with disabilities?
- Does it have a vision or mission statement that reflects all children?

Preschool Administration

In growing or expanding your program you will be adding children. This will entail additional paperwork and coordination, both in terms of children identified for special education and non-identified students.

- Is there a written district procedure regarding Early Childhood class size?
- Is there a written district procedure regarding staff certification for Early Childhood classrooms?
- Is there a written district procedure regarding staff/child ratio for Early Childhood classrooms?
- How will the district recruit or advertise for non-identified children?
- Who will manage the process and what will be required to enroll non-identified students?
- If tuition is collected, who will be responsible and what is the procedure for collection?

Curriculum

If your district has been operating only Early Childhood Special Education classrooms/programs, there may be a need to explore Early Childhood curriculums or evidence based practices. It will be important to provide all program staff with training and professional development opportunities to learn how to use the curriculum effectively across disciplines within the classroom

- Do we use curricula?
- Are the curricula evidence based?
- Are our curricula aligned with Early Childhood expectations?
- Do we need to explore additional curricula?
- Do we have the resources to train all classroom staff in curricula development?

Infrastructure Development

Implementation Science (a research based framework for systems change) tells us that we need some specific structures in place to enable system change, which would include program model growth. Specifically, a Leadership Team is needed to coordinate and drive the work.

SUPPORT TO DISTRICTS TO EXPAND PRESCHOOL PROGRAMMING

Opening an Early Childhood classroom/program is no small task. The Race2K project is funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education to assist school districts in their efforts to support preschool aged children with disabilities. Project staff are available to assist school districts in both assessing current preschool program models and capacity and in implementing strategies to expand program to access to Early Childhood classrooms/programs. For more information on the Race 2K project or to request technical assistance please visit www.race2k.org

Expansion Capacity Checklist

It is suggested that Administrators meet with Preschool Coordinators or others involved in a district's preschool program to discuss the questions raised in the *Moving Your District's Preschool Programming Forward* and complete the Checklist together. It is important to remember that this Guide and tools are not designed to “evaluate” a program but rather to generate discussion about the characteristics of the program and the capacity of a school district. As a reminder, Race2K is also available to assist you in discussing your district's program and options for moving forward.

DATE:

PERSONS COMPLETING RUBRIC:

EXPANSION CAPACITY CHECKLIST

Current Structures	In Place?	Notes/Next Steps:
Could expansion be possible by revisiting classroom age ranges?	Yes No Unsure	
Can the district increase ratios to provide expansion? If so, what could they be?	Yes No Unsure	
Could the district increase class enrollment to provide for expansion? If so, what would that be?	Yes No Unsure	
Could the district add an additional session to the program schedule to achieve program expansion? What would that look like?	Yes No Unsure	
Could the district add an additional day to the program schedule to achieve expansion? What would that look like?	Yes No Unsure	
Are there community programs that the district could partner with? If so, who?		
Fiscal	In Place?	Notes/Next Steps:
How is our current preschool programming funded?	n/a	
Are we currently spending our entire Federal 619 allotment?	Yes No Unsure	
Do we have access to additional funding to pay for staff, staff training, materials or space?	Yes No Unsure	
Are there any grant opportunities or ability to leverage funds such as Title I?	Yes No Unsure	
How will expansion impact transportation?	n/a	

Space Needs	In Place?	Notes/Next Steps:
Is additional classroom space available within the current program space?	Yes No Unsure	
Is classroom space for expansion available in another school district building? If so, where?	Yes No Unsure	
Is the available space appropriate for preschool aged children? (ie: bathrooms, playgrounds) If not, what would it take to make it appropriate?	Yes No Unsure	
Will the program be impacted if there are classrooms in multiple locations? If so, how?	Yes No Unsure	
Staffing	In Place?	Notes/Next Steps:
Do we have sufficient staff with appropriate certifications?	Yes No Unsure	
How will program growth impact the service delivery model?	Yes No Unsure	
Do we have administrative capacity to manage a larger program? If not, what will be needed?	Yes No Unsure	
Program Identity	In Place?	Notes/Next Steps:
Do we have a preschool program mission or vision statement that is reflective of all children?	Yes No Unsure	
Does our preschool program have an identity as an Early Childhood program?	Yes No Unsure	
Are our current curricula aligned with Early Childhood expectations? If not, what will be needed?	Yes No Unsure	
Infrastructure Development	In Place?	Notes/Next Steps:
A Leadership Team including administrators, practitioners, and other stakeholders is in place to take responsibility for addressing and making decisions regarding program policy, initiatives and implementation	Yes No Unsure	
The Leadership Team has administrative support	Yes No Unsure	
The Leadership Team meets on a regular basis (at least once a month for 1 hour)	Yes No Unsure	

