

State: California

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Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Subsidized Child Care in California

Inclusion of children with disabilities in child care has three critical components: **access** to a wide range of learning opportunities and settings, the provision of individualized approaches and accommodations to promote the child's active **participation** in learning, and the system-level **supports** that the individuals and organizations providing inclusive services need (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). SRI International and the California Department of Education are conducting a mixed-methods study of the inclusion of children with disabilities under age 5 in subsidized child care in California. The four project objectives are to (1) describe the status of children with disabilities in subsidized child care; (2) identify the facilitators and barriers to the inclusion of children with disabilities in subsidized child care; (3) identify strategies with a high likelihood of increasing the facilitators and decreasing the barriers, including policy revisions; and (4) enhance the state's capacity to participate in and conduct ongoing research to improve the inclusion of children with disabilities in subsidized child care.

The study will address four overarching research questions: (1) To what extent do families of children with disabilities **access** subsidized child care? (2) For children with disabilities who are receiving subsidized care, what is the extent of their **participation** in high-quality learning environments and activities? (3) What **supports** are available for child care and school system personnel and families to promote the full inclusion of children with disabilities in subsidized child care? and (4) What national, state, and local policies and other supports are needed to increase access and participation of children with disabilities in subsidized care?

To answer these questions, the study team will use a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative methods will include analysis of state administrative data sets on subsidized child care and special education and statewide surveys of preschool special education administrators and child care center directors. Interviews with key informants and case studies in six communities will examine the ways the child care and special education sectors are or are not working together to support inclusion. Community data collection will include interviews with families, child care directors and teachers, special education directors and teachers, and other related services personnel. Observations in child care centers will determine the overall quality of the classroom, as well as the quality of the individualized support for children with disabilities. Community-level data collection will focus on what is working and what is standing in the way of including children with disabilities in subsidized care.

Key stakeholder groups in California will be kept informed during the study and contribute to interpreting and applying the results within the state context. The study also will be strengthened through the ongoing guidance of a group of nationally known researchers in child care and inclusion.