



**Universal PreK (UPK) Café:
Special Series Issue #6
Inclusive Environments and Universal Practices
July 12, 2021**

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the 6th issue in our UPK Café Special Series. The series focuses on recovery, reconnection, and resources to support school district recovery and implementation plans. This issue centers on inclusive environments and universal best practices in early education. Evidence-based resources supporting inclusion and universal practices for preschool students are included at the end of the document.

Dignity

“Less able does not mean less worthy.” Rud Turnbull, Marianna and Ross Beach Distinguished Professor Emeritus in Special Education, University of Kansas

Each and every child and their family are entitled to dignity. Dignity means attributing inherent value to a person. It is ascribed to a person by others and inherent in the child and their family regardless of disability. It is paramount that early childhood practitioners ascribe dignity to each and every child and their family and make sure that they receive it. Dignity along with compassion, empathy in early inclusive environments, lead to ethical, compassionate, and inclusive communities now and in the future.

Inclusion and Universal PreK (UPK)

“Inclusion in early childhood programs refers to including children with disabilities in early childhood programs, together with their peers without disabilities; holding high expectations and intentionally promoting participation in all learning and social activities, facilitated by individualized accommodations; and using evidence-based services and supports to foster their development (cognitive, language, communication, physical, behavioral, and social-emotional), friendships with peers, and sense of belonging. This applies to all young children with disabilities, from those with the mildest disabilities, to those with the most significant disabilities.” U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs (2015).

The intent of Act 166 and UPK education is to ensure equitable access for each and every young preschool age student and their family. Inclusion continues whether preschool students are participating in person or remotely. The [Vermont Guiding Principles, Division for Early Childhood \(DEC\) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children \(NAEYC\) Joint Policy Statement on Inclusion](#) (2009) and the U.S. Department of Health And Human

Services and U.S. Department of Education’s joint [Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs](#) (2015) are vital documents to help guide and implement best inclusive practices and environments.

The Local Program Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion

[The Local Program Indicators and Elements of High-Quality Inclusion](#) is a newly developed national resource that details the key elements necessary for promoting high-quality inclusive policies, procedures, and practices at a local program level. They are designed to assist school districts and their UPK program partners in ensuring the implementation of high-quality inclusive practices across all programs for the meaningful participation and equitable access of each and every young child with disabilities. The major focus for the Local Program Indicators is the enhancement of program policies, procedures, and guidance on high-quality inclusive practices within the Vermont early childhood system.

Vermont’s Guiding Principles and Early Multi-tiered System of Supports (Early MTSS)

Adopting the [Vermont Guiding Principles](#) and implementing Early MTSS is an effective way to establish a comprehensive, evidence-based, and systemic framework. Early MTSS is innovation neutral. When implemented to fidelity, Early MTSS will improve equitable access and participation for each and every child within high-quality inclusive learning environments. Early MTSS promotes the use of [Pyramid Model Practices](#) as a wraparound approach to support young children’s social and emotional competence and confidence.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) gives all students an equal opportunity to succeed. This approach to teaching and learning offers flexibility in the ways students access material and show what they know. UDL also looks for different ways to keep students motivated. The goal of UDL is to use a variety of teaching methods to remove any barriers to learning. It’s about building in flexibility that can be adjusted for each and every child’s strengths and needs which benefits all learners. There are three major principles of UDL:

- **Multiple means of representation** is giving learners a variety of ways to gain access to information and content through multiple levels of complexity and multiple forms of communication.
- **Multiple means of engagement** is gaining and maintaining learner interest. The concept of engagement can be divided into two big ideas: recruiting children’s interest and sustaining their attention and persistence to a task.
- **Multiple means of action and expression** is providing children with a variety of ways for demonstrating what they know. This UDL principle considers two key aspects— multiple acceptable formats for making responses and multiple acceptable levels of complexity of responding.

What You Do Makes a Difference!

It is important that educators and staff be reminded that young students may be anxious, distracted, or have lower frustration thresholds returning in the fall. Nurturing and building culturally responsive practices is paramount. A student's social and emotional needs **must** be addressed prior to any other learning. Special considerations for each and every child should be taken into account to match expectations.

Employing practical strategies can help preschool students with friendship skills, emotional literacy, problem solving, and within classroom transitions, rituals, and routines. When children understand what is expected and are provided the opportunity and support to engage in appropriate behaviors, they are more likely to choose positive behavior, reducing the likelihood of using challenging behaviors.

As we consider the various ways classrooms may operate in the future, the webinar, from the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA), [Reimagining Inclusion: High-Quality Inclusion for Young Children with Disabilities When Our World is Turned Upside Down](#), explores the continued importance of inclusion for young children with disabilities. Multiple opportunities that exist for building, sustaining and growing high-quality inclusion are highlighted, as well as lessons learned from Spring 2020 about successful family partnerships with service providers while receiving virtual early childhood special education and related services. For each opportunity discussed, state administrators across the country and their partners highlight strategies to support inclusion and enriched social interactions at home and in the community.

Additional Resources for Inclusion and Universal Practices

- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA)
 - [Equitably Serving Children with Disabilities and their Families during Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)
 - [Research and Studies on Inclusion Collection](#)
- National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)
 - [Some Starters for Giving Positive Feedback and Encouragement](#)
 - [Tips and Ideas for Making Visuals to Support Young Children with Challenging Behavior](#)
 - [Suspension and Expulsion Resources](#)
 - [Free Modules for Learning Pyramid Practices](#)
- Brookes Publishing Company
 - [Inclusion Lab](#) (free resources and articles)
 - [Enhancing Early Ed Classrooms with UDL](#) (blog post)

- STEMIE Innovation for Inclusion in Early Education
 - [Inclusion Video Series](#)
- University of Florida
 - [Core Concepts in Disability Policy and Dignity - Rud Turnbull 2018](#)
- Minnesota Department of Administration Council on Developmental Disabilities
 - [The Convergence of Disability Law and Policy: Core Concepts, Ethical Communities, and the Notion of Dignity; Interview with Rud Turnbull](#)
- Vermont Agency of Education: The Right Stuff
 - [Culture Diversity and Equity Resources](#)
 - [Building Resilience Resources](#)
 - [Equity and Inclusion Resources](#)
 - [Anti-Bias Education and Leadership in Early Childhood Resources](#)
 - [Supporting the Learning and Development of Young Children Who are DLLS](#)

If you have received this issue from a coworker and would like to be place on the UPK Café listserv, please email Leslie at leslie.freedman@vermont.gov.

Be well and stay healthy,

The Early Education Team