

Including All Students:

FREQUENTLY ASKED
QUESTIONS ABOUT
INCLUDING STUDENTS
WITH DISABILITIES IN
AFTERSCHOOL AND
SUMMER PROGRAMS



Purpose and Scope

This FAQ was developed to support and guide staff and volunteers working directly with students in afterschool and summer programs. It is intended to be used as a resource and complement to more in-depth orientation and training.

What is a useful definition of disability?

- There are different definitions of disability that are used to determine eligibility for services and supports. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a nondiscrimination statute that covers all students in afterschool programs, considers an individual “to have a disability if he or she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.”
- Students with disabilities have one or more sensory, mental, physical or emotional condition(s), and may require special services, supports, accommodations, and/or program modifications in order to access and participate in afterschool programs. Students with disabilities may meet the criteria to be classified through the special education process under one of the following classifications: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, learning disability, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health-impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury or visual impairment. ([New York State Education Department \(NYSED\), Office of Special Education—Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, Part 200 Students with Disabilities](#)) Under NYS Regulations, a student needs to meet the criteria for only one classification, (what the committee determines is the primary reason for the student experiencing challenges in school), to receive special education services. Eligible students receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) designed to address their specific needs in school.
- In 2012, the top three classifications of students in special education in New York were learning disabilities (36.7%), speech or language impairments (25.1%), and other health impairments (15.3%) such as attention deficit disorder (ADD), Tourette syndrome, asthma, diabetes, and seizure disorders.
- Each child with a disability is different and his or her disability (ies) do not define his or her needs. Disabilities include a wide range of symptoms and different levels of severity, even within a single diagnosis. While some students with disabilities require special accommodations and program modifications, others do not. Children should be actively engaged and given choices to determine what is effective.

What out-of-school time programs are currently available for students with disabilities?

- Afterschool and expanded learning programs are supported by federal, state, and local funding streams in the state of New York. Chief among them are [21st Century Community Learning Centers](#) (federal funding, NYSED), [Extended School Day/School Violence Prevention](#) (state funding, New York State Education Department), [Advantage After School](#) (state funding,

New York State Office of Children and Family Services [OCFS]), and [the Comprehensive After School System of New York City \(COMPASS NYC\)](#) (New York City local funding, New York City Department of Youth and Community Development).

- To find programs in your area, explore NYSAN’s [Afterschool Map](#) or the Partnership for After School Education’s (PASE) [Afterschool Programs and Youth Services Directory](#).

How can students with disabilities benefit from being a part of an afterschool program?

- As for all students, participation in out-of-school time and expanded learning programs provides students with disabilities the opportunity to become a part of an inclusive environment where they receive extended academic support, partake in extracurricular activities such as sports and arts, develop meaningful relationships with students and adults they may not typically interact with during the school day, and gain greater self-awareness, self-confidence, and appropriate social and emotional skills.

What rights does a child with disabilities have when it comes to afterschool?

- Students with disabilities are protected under [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) which bars discrimination of students based on disability. ([US Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education—21st CCLC Non-Regulatory Guidance, 2003](#)) Accordingly, state and federally-funded and operated afterschool programs are required to accommodate students with disabilities of any kind, and must do so in the most inclusive way possible.
- A student who meets the eligibility criteria to receive special education services has the right to obtain a specialized educational pro-

gram for in school time that meets their specific academic, social/emotional, behavior and management needs. These and other students may be eligible for reasonable accommodations and program modifications under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and programs are required to make reasonable accommodations as requested.

- Privately owned or operated youth programs and facilities, known as public accommodations, fall under the obligations of Title III of the ADA, and require that no youth is discriminated against or excluded on the basis of their disability.

What does it mean to operate an inclusive afterschool program?

- Inclusion is the practice of teaching or including students with disabilities in the same space and programming as students who do not have disabilities. Practicing inclusion means treating students with disabilities as similarly to those without disabilities as possible, ensuring a welcoming and supportive environment for all students. In many situations, inclusion simply requires sensitivity to the needs of individual students—a mindset important to working with all students—rather than any major changes to the program structure or space. United Cerebral Palsy’s [Etiquette Guide](#) outlines some basic tips for how to interact with people with different disabilities. Many of these practices would benefit students without disabilities as well.
- Some students with disabilities may require programs to implement a more individualized set of specific practices and program modifications to allow them to access and actively participate in the programs and services offered. Programs may also need to train staff in order to accommodate the particular needs of one or more participating students based on their challenges.

What can schools share with afterschool programs regarding a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP)? Can they share any other information about the child's special needs?

[The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 \(IDEA\)](#) governs how states and public agencies provide services to eligible children and youth with disabilities, including students who receive services through an [IEP](#). IDEA, under the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#), requires schools to preserve the confidentiality of data and records pertaining to students with disabilities. Information regarding a student's IEP and other information pertaining to their education and special education records can be released to afterschool programs with parental consent and approval. Here is a [sample waiver](#) for authorizing the release of this information (Courtesy of Laurie Penney McGee, MS, CTRS). Confidential information, once received by an approved party, cannot be re-released to another party without parental consent. ([US Department of Education, Family Policy Compliance Office \(FPCO\); NYSED, Office of Special Education](#))

Where can staff get trained on working with students with disabilities and learn best practices for inclusion?

- Information on specific disabilities can be found in the New York State Education Department's Information and Reporting Services Data Summaries detailing [Children with Disabilities Receiving Special Education Program and Services](#) for the state. For disability specific information, read the Institute for Community Inclusion's [Disability Fact Sheets](#) or Harford County Public Schools Office of Special Education's [Tips for Spe-](#)

[cial Education Paraeducators and Inclusion Helpers.](#)

- There are multiple organizations and agencies that provide trainings and resources for afterschool staff and professionals on how to work with children and youth with disabilities.
 - ⇒ The NYSED Office of Special Education identifies multiple [technical assistance centers and resources](#) educational professionals can utilize.
 - ⇒ [The Advocacy Center](#) offers in-person workshops throughout the state of New York and webinars throughout the year concentrating on a number of disability-related topics. They also provide a variety of resources and monthly newsletters to keep their partners informed.
 - ⇒ [Advocates for Children of New York](#) provides trainings in specific topic areas for parents and professionals working with students with disabilities and offers workshops throughout the year. They also provide up-to-date guides and resources.
 - ⇒ [Kids Included Together \(KIT\)](#) has developed the National Training Center for Inclusion (NTCI) which offers fee-based, self-paced online professional development including online courses, webinars, videos, and guides aimed at supporting programs to develop and maintain inclusive afterschool programs.
 - ⇒ Inclusion workshops are also offered by trainers and at conferences in New York over the course of the year. Check out [Afterschool Pathfinder](#) for upcoming trainings.

What models can program directors look to when planning an inclusive program?

If you already operate an inclusive afterschool program, or would like to start one, you can find multiple resources available with strategies and tips on how to operate and maintain an inclusive afterschool program.

⇒The California After School Resource Center (CASRC) has many [resources for after school professionals](#) on how to implement and maintain an inclusive after school environment.

⇒Build the Out-of-School Time Network (BOSTnet) has developed tips and tools for [Promoting the Inclusion of Children and Youth with Disabilities](#) for afterschool professionals. This inclusion guide offers a self-assessment tool, strategies for encouraging positive behavior, adapting activities, and diversifying your program.

⇒The California Department of Education has produced a guide, [Inclusion Works!](#), aimed at supporting the creation of child care programs that promote belonging for children with special needs. Inclusion Works! includes information about how to support students

with special needs and offers strategies on how to find additional help and collaborate with specialists and parents.

⇒The Advocacy Center’s [Together Including Every Student \(TIES\)](#) program, based in Rochester and working throughout the region, provides a short training for student volunteers on interacting respectfully and supportively with students with disabilities and then organizes activities for all students to participate in together.

How can programs involve school day special education teachers and aides in students’ participation in the afterschool program?

- Whenever possible, programs can involve special education teachers and aides in their

How can programs involve parents of students with disabilities?

- Programs should involve parents of students with disabilities in the same manner as they involve parents of students without disabilities. It is important that the afterschool provider form a relationship with a student’s family in order to evaluate how best to serve him or her. This includes informing the parent of all necessary information about their students’ academics, behavior, physical, mobility, environmental, medication, and social and emotional needs to ensure a smooth transition from the afterschool program to home.
- Ask what strategies parents use at home with their child, such as:
 - * What soothes or redirects the child when he/she is stressed or frustrated?
 - * What attracts the student’s attention?
 - * What is the student interested in?
 - * What actions or situations (triggers) may upset or be difficult for the student?
- Parents are usually the most important resource and partner when including a student, and they can help to prepare staff properly, prevent problems, and intervene effectively if program staff find that they are having difficulty accommodating a particular student.
- There are many organizations that support parents of students with disabilities, including:
 - ⇒ [Parent to Parent of New York State](#)
 - ⇒ [Resources for Children with Special Needs \(RSCN\)](#)
 - ⇒ [Sinergia](#)
 - ⇒ [Parent Training Information Centers and NYSED Parent Centers](#)
 - ⇒ [Families Together in New York State](#)
 - ⇒ [Inclusive Recreation Resource Center](#)

afterschool program the same way they would involve any other school day staff member.

- Developing a relationship with the school day special education teachers and aides is crucial. It is important to understand the strategies they use with the students you both serve to ensure consistency and to create a familiar, comfortable environment for students with disabilities.
- If you or an afterschool staff member is having a challenging time with a student, lean on the student's school day inclusion support team for guidance. It may be helpful to observe the school day staff working with this particular student, invite the school day staff to observe you or your staff with the student and allow for feedback, or see if the school day inclusion staff can provide a training highlighting successful strategies they use during the school day.
- When the program is planning events and celebrations, be sure to invite the school day inclusion staff to participate and attend such occasions. Also, thank the inclusion staff for their support of the program throughout the school year.
- Some students with disabilities have the support of an individual paraprofessional staff during the school day. If your program's funding allows for this type of staff, it could increase the success of these students in your program. You should work with families and school special education staff to determine what is necessary for specific children.

How can programs proactively prevent and/or respond to bullying of students based on disabilities?

Students with disabilities are more likely to be bullied than other students ([Pacer Center](#)). An important aspect of developing an inclusive program is ensuring the environment is safe, both physically and emotionally.

- As a preventative measure, program staff

should set clear expectations around behavior and ensure awareness of the effects of bullying.

- Students should be aware that bullying, especially bullying based on a student's disability, can be considered harassment and result in disciplinary actions.
- Most important is to establish a culture of respect and expectations for staff, volunteers and students, including demonstrating positive, respectful, and courteous behavior for all participants.
- If bullying has occurred, it is imperative that a trained adult address the incident and assess and attempt to mitigate any negative effects on students' academic success and emotional well-being.
- Staff should empower students to intervene when they see bullying occurring in a program and to inform a staff member promptly and without fear of having their report or veracity challenged.
- Here are a few organizations and resources for additional strategies and tips on how to address bullying:
 - ⇒ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: [Stop Bullying Campaign](#)
 - ⇒ [New York State: The Dignity for All Students Act](#)
 - ⇒ The New York City Department of Education: [Respect for All](#)
 - ⇒ The Anti-Defamation League: [Bullying Prevention and Intervention Tips](#)
 - ⇒ Pacer Center: [Bullying and Harassment of Students with Disabilities](#)

How can program directors assess whether their program can safely include a student with a particular disability and, if not, determine what steps need to be taken to accommodate the student?

- To ensure high-quality programming, it is important that programs regularly conduct

HOW TO: Modify activities to engage multiple modalities and to better support students with disabilities

Every student—whether diagnosed with a disability or not—learns differently, so a particular modification may work for one student but not for another. It's important to try a variety of strategies to see which works best for the students you are serving. Here are some helpful tips:

- **Prior to delivering a lesson:** State the objective and goal of the activity, teach mental activities involved in listening (such as questioning, making inferences, etc.) and pre-teach difficult vocabulary and concepts.
- **During the lesson:** Provide visuals, give explanations in small steps, have students take notes, provide written and oral directions, have students repeat directions, and check for understanding.
- If a student is still struggling, try to address their difficulty individually—are they having difficulty listening? reading? writing? focusing? Adapt appropriately.

If you are having a difficult time coming up with a solution that works for a particular student, don't be afraid to use those around you for help. Talk to the student's school day teacher and/or special education teacher, the school's inclusion specialist, or the student's parents to find out what instructional methods approaches, modifications, and accommodations have been successful in the past.

For additional resources and strategies on how to modify and adapt your lessons try the following resources:

- ⇒ California After School Resource Center: [Instructional Accommodations vs. Modifications](#)
- ⇒ Reading Rockets: [How to Adapt Your Teaching Strategies to Student Needs](#)
- ⇒ To learn more about how to engage multiple modalities, review the National Writing Project's [Inclusion and the Multiple Intelligences: Creating a Student-Centered](#)

self-assessments to ensure continuous improvement and development. Programs can use NYSAN's [Quality Self-Assessment \(QSA\) Tool](#) to help better understand the indicators of a high-quality program and reflect on all aspects of program operation, including inclusion practices.

- The After School Programs Inclusion Project in California has developed a [Before and After School Program Site Inclusion Quality Self-Assessment Tool](#) for programs to use in evaluating their programs to ensure that they practice inclusion in multiple components of program including program environment, services, staff, instruction, materials, and that

program includes all children with special needs and/or disabilities.

How can programs track their outcomes as related to inclusion of students with disabilities?

- Aside from using a QSA Tool to evaluate program quality and inclusion efforts, programs should track key outcomes that demonstrate effective inclusion in afterschool programs. The Special Needs Inclusion Project (SNIP) has developed an [Inclusion Tool Kit](#) for afterschool programs to use detailing high quality standards for practicing inclusion and ensuring your program provides an inclusive environment.

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New York State Afterschool Network (NYSAN) is a public-private partnership of organizations throughout the state dedicated to building a youth-serving system that increases the quality and availability of afterschool and expanded learning programs.