

New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)

Afterschool and Summer Programming

Inclusion of Participants with Disabilities

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is DYCD policy on serving participants who have a disability?

DYCD funds afterschool and summer programs that offer a mix of academic support, sports, arts, and recreational activities to young people in New York City. These programs create a safe and engaging environment for young individuals to learn, explore their interests, and develop important life skills. DYCD-funded programs aim to be welcoming and inclusive for all participants, with a focus on how each participant can best be served and, if needed, how they can be accommodated to engage safely and successfully in program services. DYCD-funded programs must comply with all applicable laws including, but not limited to, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Rehabilitation Act, the New York State Human Rights Law, and the New York City Human Rights Law.

What are the laws supporting inclusion?

There are [laws](#) that prohibit discrimination against children with disabilities and require programs to make reasonable accommodations that allow the student to participate in the program. What would be considered “reasonable” is based on participant needs and program resources. 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.”

According to the New York State School Age Child Care (SACC) Regulations, a SACC program may not refuse to admit a child to a program solely because the child has a developmental delay or a disability or has been diagnosed as having human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), an HIV-related illness, or acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). A childcare program must make an individualized assessment to determine whether the participant could be accommodated in the program if reasonable accommodations are made to the premises and/or program without significant additional expense. There are many strategies, practices, and resources to support the assessment process shared below, including the [Inclusion Checklist](#).

How can we establish an inclusive environment?

Listed below are some practices that DYCD-funded programs can use to help ensure that participants are welcome, accepted, and included in afterschool and summer program spaces. Each child with a disability is different, and their disability does not define their needs.

- Organization leadership can provide information on laws, policies, and guidelines in providing inclusive services to young people.
- Learn about the various accommodations that can be made for children and youth with specific disabilities, including from this [Inclusion Checklist](#).
- Develop relationships with the families of students to consider how best to serve them. Engage parents and caregivers in interactive conversations at enrollment. Ask open-ended questions to explore how you can best support participants.
- Collaborate with the participant's school to identify how needs are met during the school day.
- Explore the use of online tools to help provide thoughtful strategies.
- Maintain a positive attitude and recognize the value that each child can bring to the program.
- Develop ongoing relationships with colleagues and organizations that provide services or offer information about people with disabilities (see helpful resources below).

Ideas for Planning Inclusive Classrooms:

1. Create, post, and review the visual schedule and classroom agreements/expectations and use them throughout the day.
2. Provide visual supports (timers, pictures of routines, and step by step directions).
3. Create and use systems of organization to help students navigate their environment (e.g., organizing materials, keeping areas free of clutter, and color-coding systems).
4. Create soothing environmental conditions (reduction in lighting, fidgets, private workspaces, and access to a quiet or calming corner).
5. Prepare for transitions (e.g., verbal and visual countdowns, previewing).
6. Support transitions (holding hands, strategic line spots—front or back, visual markers of where to go/stand).
7. Create & teach routines (teach, model, practice, provide feedback, reinforce).
8. Break down complex tasks into steps and make a list.
9. Create doable first steps (Put Your Name on the Paper, Stretch Your Fingers).
10. Use verbal cues (I am going to give you three directions—Number 1...).
11. Support student use of assistive technology.
12. Allow preferential seating.
13. Create a “look book” with pictures of adults that will be supporting the child and explain their roles.
14. Seek and incorporate feedback from students and families to identify what is working and what can be improved.

What are some helpful resources?

- [Family Engagement Online Toolkit](#): DYCD programs embody this framework through three key strategies—Communication, Participation, and Partnerships.
- [INCLUDEnyc](#): connects young people to resources and helps them to thrive in school, at work, and in the community.
- [Partnership for After-School Education \(PASE\)](#): exists to improve the quality of after-school programs for children and teens living in poverty.
- [Accessibility and Universal Design](#): DYCD offers a self-paced training for DYCD providers on accessibility and inclusion. It provides practical strategies that organizations can implement to create a more inclusive environment.
- [Understood](#): Understood provides resources and support so people who learn and think differently can thrive in school, at work, and throughout life.
- [New York State Network for Youth Success](#) is dedicated to building a youth-serving system that increases the quality and availability of afterschool and expanded learning programs.
- [Network for Youth Success: Including All Participants](#)
- [Kids Included Together Inclusion Checklist for Programs](#)
- [Adapt Community Network](#)
- [Partners for Youth with Disabilities](#): provides organizations with training on disability inclusion.
- [Aspire Registry](#) is an online system that supports early childhood professionals.

What types of training and professional development opportunities are available?

Organization leadership must develop and communicate policies and practices to support program personnel. Staff who may not have formal training or experience working with youth with disabilities can benefit from basic training and ongoing professional development to provide stronger support to people with disabilities.

DYCD technical assistance and capacity building providers, including, for example, Change Impact, Partnership for After School Education (PASE), Vibrant Emotional Health, and Ramapo for Children, provide free training and professional development to DYCD-funded programs. Topics include behavioral challenges, trauma-informed programs, strength-based approaches, and adult mental health first aid. New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) also has resources available to providers on topics such as Introduction to Verbal Behavior and Strategies that Support Attention. Ask your DYCD Program Manager for a schedule of capacity-building trainings.

Where can I go for additional guidance?

- Contact your DYCD Program Manager for support, and to identify additional resources or to access technical assistance and capacity building. DYCD will assist you to identify accommodations in order to ensure that all youth can participate fully in programs.
- NYCPS Office of School Health also supports DYCD-funded programs, assisting to facilitate the 504 process where a student may be entitled to additional support in COMPASS school-based programs.