

**Inclusive Preschool Classroom:  
A collaboration between  
Marin County SELPA, Marin County Office of Education  
Lifeshouse Agency, and Dominican University of California**



The Marin County SELPA and Marin County Office of Education (MCOE) are collaborating with Lifeshouse Agency and Dominican University of California to pilot one inclusive preschool classroom beginning Fall 2018. This joint venture is designed to meet the needs of our community members, specifically young children—with and without special needs—and their parents.

**Benefits of Early Childhood Education**

Decades of research from around the world identify the cognitive and social benefits of early intervention for young children (Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016). The state of California emphasizes the importance of early childhood education as a means to narrow the achievement gap, which often exists by kindergarten, especially for children with disabilities, those from low-income families, or those where English is not the language of the home (California Task Force on Special Education, 2015).

Early childhood education has lasting effects, including a reduction in the need for special education services in elementary school, an increase in high school and college graduation rates, and more lucrative employment options (Belfield, 2005; Temple & Reynolds, 2007). In addition to the benefits to children, families also reap rewards. Specifically, research on Head Start programs notes that participating parents engage in more reading with their children, increase responsiveness in their parenting style, and lessen their use of time-out as a disciplinary method (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

**Benefits of *Inclusive* Early Childhood Education**

Both state and federal education offices are in support of inclusive early childhood settings, where typically developing children and those with special needs play and learn together (California Task Force on Special Education, 2015; US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2015).

When students with special needs are provided inclusive, high-quality early education—which includes access to the general education curriculum, participation with typically developing peers, and special education supports as appropriate per their IFSP/IEP—they achieve at higher rates (Division for Early Childhood & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; Odom, et. al, 2004). In fact, they may even catch up to their peers, due to the significant brain development occurring during this time (Dawson, 2010; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2004). The higher expectations of the general education curriculum and peer models for language, socialization, and

behavior are identified as significant factors towards this positive development. Specifically, compared to peers with special needs in separate settings, students provided an inclusive preschool learning environment benefited in the following ways: greater cognitive and communication development, increased levels of engagement, more opportunities to practice new skills, and stronger social-emotional skills (Henninger & Gupta, 2014; Odom, et. al, 2004; and US Department of Health and Human Services & US Department of Education, 2015.)

Inclusive education has shown to benefit typically developing students as well, contrary to the concern that the inclusion of students with disabilities would lower the overall academic achievement. In particular, students further develop empathy and leadership skills and demonstrate higher levels of acceptance towards various kinds of diversity (Henninger & Gupta, 2014; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Odom, et. al, 2004).

Due to the above benefits to all students of inclusion, state and federal governments are moving towards more inclusive settings, including furthering current collaboration between general and special education teachers and changing the standards for credentialing. California recommends moving towards educating pre-service teachers to have the capacity to teach *all* students, including English Language Learners and those with special needs (California Task Force on Special Education, 2015). Dominican University is already ahead of most other teacher education programs, as it offers a dual credential program in special education as well as either an elementary or secondary credential.

### **Contributions of the Collaborators**

In undertaking this inclusive preschool project, representatives from Marin County SELPA, Marin County Office of Education, Lifehouse, and Dominican University have been collaborating for the past year in researching high-quality instruction. This has involved visiting successful, local inclusive programs, such as Learning Links Preschool in Burlingame and Presidio Early Education School in San Francisco. The collaborating organizations have clearly delineated roles and responsibilities around finances, administration, instruction, and research.

#### Marin County SELP/Marin County Office of Education

##### *Special Education Services*

- Assume the financial responsibilities for providing all services identified in IFSPs/IEPs during the four-hour preschool day, including the special education teacher
- Provide the location for the inclusive preschool classroom, which will be located at the Marindale campus in San Rafael

#### Lifehouse Agency

##### *General Education Services*

- Assume the financial and administrative responsibilities for general education services, including teachers and paraprofessionals
- Assume responsibility for preschool licensure

Dominican University of California  
*Pedagogical Support/Consultation*

- Provide guidance in curriculum and instruction relying upon research-based practices and standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), and the California Preschool Learning Foundations (California Department of Education, 2008)
- Provide guidance with collaboration between general and special education teachers, as well as all members of the teaching team, including paraprofessionals
- Provide student interns in education, occupational therapy, counseling, and nursing to assist at the preschool
- Research the effectiveness on all students of the inclusive preschool

The inclusive preschool collaborators recognize the evidence in support of inclusive education, specifically with benefits to language, socialization, and academic development. This preschool will be at the forefront of state and national mandates for inclusive education and serve as a model for future classrooms both in Marin County and nationwide.

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