

“Include Me From The Start”

The Arc of Pennsylvania will administer a new statewide training & technical assistance initiative in Pennsylvania intended to assist children with significant disabilities be included in regular education classrooms in their neighborhood schools. The initiative is called “Include Me From The Start”. It will provide intensive training and technical assistance to about 30 school districts statewide to ensure that 150 children entering either kindergarten or first grade receive their education in general education classrooms. The initiative is being administered independently from, but funded by, the PA Department of Education. The objectives of this 2.5-year, \$500,000 per year initiative are to 1) include the children early and make it less likely they will be segregated throughout their school-age years, and 2) help build inclusion capacity within the students’ school districts. A critical component of the program is its outcome evaluation, which will be geared toward continuous improvement and being able to successfully replicate what works in other school districts across the Commonwealth. Pennsylvania is ranked 39th in the nation when it comes to how well it does including students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their peers without disabilities. The initiative is an outgrowth of litigation (*Gaskin v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*) that alleged the state was failing to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

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