

## inclusion for preschool children

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that special education students be served in the least restrictive environment (LRE). BCIU is required to begin this process with students between the ages of 3 and 5 who are enrolled in the Early Intervention (EI) program.

If BCIU can provide a successful inclusion opportunity for students while they are in EI, the transition to school-age programming at the school district will be much easier for the student, the family, and school district personnel. BCIU's goal is to help school districts continue to provide inclusion opportunities for students in the LRE when they transition. EI staff members work collaboratively with district personnel and family members to ensure a smooth transition for every student.

### Preschool Inclusion Grant

For the past three years, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has awarded grants to the BCIU to support the preschool inclusion initiative. With the help of grant funding, the EI program created an Inclusion Grant Team to focus on the objectives of the grant, forge ahead with the inclusion process, and attain inclusion goals.



The grant team, which is composed of a supervisor, psychologist, and teachers, identifies potential early care and education centers (preschools, day cares, etc.) and selects appropriate ones to serve as partners in BCIU's community-based inclusion efforts. EI assists the community sites by providing various supports and strategies, such as instructional modifications and accommodations, visual strategies/picture communication, social skills lessons, and behavior support. EI also provides training opportunities for early care and education staff.



*Children with and without special needs enjoy learning in the inclusive classroom of BCIU Early Intervention Teacher Melody Malia.*

As students are placed in community inclusion settings, pre-test and post-test assessments are conducted. Students are monitored in the areas of social-emotional, physical, cognitive,

2008: 680<sup>†</sup>

2007: 594<sup>\*</sup>

2006: 531<sup>\*</sup>

2005: 367<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>†</sup> projected for 6/20/08

<sup>\*</sup> approximate at end of year



and language development. Teacher ratings of student performance are also used to assess progress.

### Student Progress/Results

With classroom supports and strategies implemented, it was found that special education students in local, community preschool settings made discernible progress in all areas of development. From March 2005 to January 2008, the most significant progress occurred in the areas of social-emotional (13 percent increase) and language (10 percent increase) development. Numerous factors, such as class size, staff turnover, and staff development, affect student progress. Specialized instruction or teacher training may be needed to better support students in the physical and cognitive development areas.

Through the support of the grant, the dedication of BCIU Early Intervention employees, and the cooperation of community partners, the number of special education preschool students who are successfully placed in community programs has increased significantly. EI is currently serving 40 percent of the total aggregate of its students (1,490) in community preschools or childcare settings throughout Berks County. The EI program anticipates that by June 2008, it will have more

students placed in community settings than at any other time in the program's history.

“Based on projections, by June we will have placed 680 students in early care and education programs,” reported Cheri Woyurka, program administrator for Early Intervention. Furthermore, by collaborating, sharing, and modeling differentiated and specially designed instruction, the department has raised the quality of developmentally appropriate teaching in more than 175 partner sites in the county. “These advances represent significant achievements and are indicative of our end goal: to have students attain success in an inclusion setting before transitioning to their school district classroom.”

For more information about BCIU preschool special education services, please contact Cheri Woyurka at 610-987-8575 or [chewoy@berksiu.org](mailto:chewoy@berksiu.org).

*Assessments of student performance indicate that special education students in inclusive settings generally make significant progress in the areas of social-emotional and language development.*

