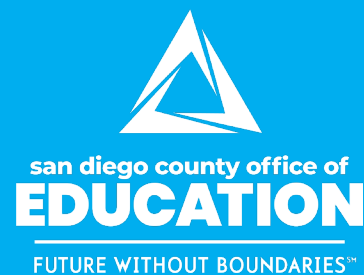


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Contract Number: 240254

Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP)

Evaluation Annual Report



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INTRODUCTION

The IEEEEP 2023–2027 grant supports 58 grantees across California in expanding access to high-quality inclusive settings for children with disabilities. These grantees represent a wide range of program types, community contexts, and levels of prior experience with inclusion. Since funds were distributed in late 2024, sites have been moving from planning into action, building the structures, partnerships, and practices needed to support inclusive early learning environments.

Site visits across 22 early learning centers provided an opportunity to look beyond planning documents and reporting to understand what implementation looks like on the ground. These visits, conducted in Spring 2025 and Spring 2026, documented implementation during an early phase of the grant. Observations offered a close view of how inclusion is taking shape through daily interactions, teaching strategies, and the use of supports for children with diverse needs. Conversations with educators, site leaders, and families provided additional insight into how decisions are being made, how resources are being used, and how staff and families are experiencing these changes.

What emerged from these visits is a snapshot of implementation, shaped by common goals, with differing strategies and starting points. Grantees are actively strengthening partnerships and expanding professional learning opportunities, with many also investing in adaptive equipment and facility renovations as they work through the challenges inherent to this phase of implementation. These observations offer an understanding of early successes, emerging barriers, and areas of promise.



Figure 1: Grantees observed in Spring 2025 and Spring 2026

GRANT LEADERSHIP TEAMS: LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Early grant activities focused on planning and decision making. Grantees established Grant Leadership Teams at the outset to guide the use of funds. These teams established priorities across professional development, adaptive equipment, and facility renovations, tailoring their focus to each site’s needs. Many teams also began making adjustments to classroom structures, working toward environments that include children with and without disabilities. These early efforts represent meaningful progress toward establishing high-quality inclusive learning environments.

Leadership Teams

Grantees reported progress in building and strengthening partnerships to support grant implementation, with most (56 of 58) on track to meet or having already met their partnership goals by late 2025. These partnerships are formalized through Grant Leadership Teams, which bring together stakeholders from diverse roles. Grantees described these teams as collaborative groups that draw on the knowledge of partners to guide planning and the use of IEEEEP funds. As shown in Figure 2, Grant Leadership Teams are broadly representative, spanning special education, school leadership, child care, and regional support roles. Other special education staff (45) and school principals or directors (44) are the most frequently

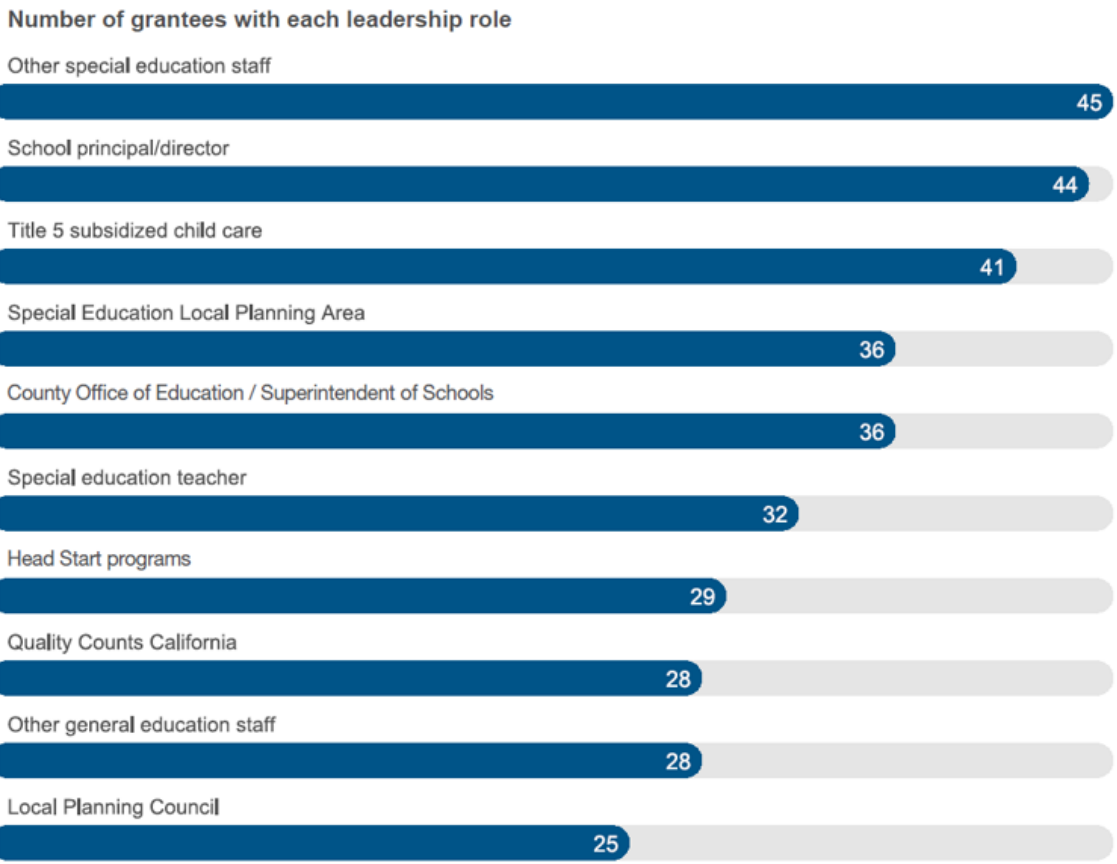


Figure 2: Leadership roles within each grantees grant leadership team as of late 2025.

represented, with County Offices of Education, Special Education Local Planning Areas, Head Start programs, and Local Planning Councils also well-represented across teams. As one grantee noted, the Grant Leadership Team serves as “an integrated way to take infant development programs, SELPA, special education, early childhood education, [and] mental health services” and apply that combined expertise to support the whole child.

Professional Development Planning

Decisions about professional development and coaching plans, which are central to the grant, are overseen by Grant Leadership Teams and informed by a combination of data collection and direct observation. In focus groups, grantees described using surveys, site visits, and conversations with educators to identify priorities and tailor supports. “We also survey teachers about what types of professional learning they’re interested in, and where they need the most support,” one site leader shared. Another emphasized the importance of grounding decisions in observed practice: “When we go in and visit, we actually can see some of the needs that they may have... and have conversations with the administrators about what their staff needs.” These approaches are often paired with coaching systems, where coaches play an active role not only in supporting instruction but also in identifying resource needs. At sites using this combined approach, the result is a decision-making process that is both multi layered and responsive.

Classroom Structure Changes

Changes to classroom structure are also being guided by Grant Leadership Teams as sites work toward more inclusive models. Differences in structure were apparent during classroom visits. Most sites entered the grant with well-established inclusive classrooms already in place, while others were in earlier stages of transitioning away from special day class models. Across survey responses from staff at IEEEP sites, over 60% described their classrooms as fully inclusive, where children with disabilities receive services alongside their peers. Co-teaching models are emerging as a strategy among some sites, with 31% of grantees indicating that they are currently implementing co-teaching models in their classrooms. At this stage, many grantees are working to adjust classroom structures, with Grant Leadership Teams helping to guide these steps toward inclusion.

EARLY SIGNS OF PROGRESS AND SUCCESSES

Site visits provided evidence of meaningful progress across key grant priorities, including professional development, adaptive equipment purchases, and efforts to support long-term sustainability. While many of these areas are still in early stages, grant leads were able to point to concrete steps already taken or next steps planned out. Biannual reporting data reinforces this pattern, with the majority of grantees indicating they are

on track across key grant priorities, as seen in Figure 3. Notably, all grantees reported being on track to expand access to inclusive early learning settings. Sites pointed to concrete indicators of this progress, including increased enrollment of children with disabilities across 27 grantees and newly formed partnerships to support inclusion across 25 grantees.

Professional Development and Coaching

Effects of professional development and coaching were often visible in how teachers approached instruction and supported children throughout the day. Many educators described trying new strategies they had learned, whether through supporting use of adaptive equipment or responding to challenging behavior. Survey responses from educators reflect this application of knowledge, with 87% of those who took professional development trainings noting that they apply what they learn to their classrooms.

Coaching, in particular, was frequently referenced as a support that helped translate training into practice. In some settings, this showed up as more intentional use of inclusive strategies with Universal Design for Learning and Pyramid training routinely mentioned as guiding current practice. As depicted in Figure 4, reporting data highlights the breadth of coaching provided, with 41 of 58 grantees implementing practice-based coaching by late 2025.



Figure 3: Grantees reported progress towards goals as of late 2025.

Which of the following professional development activities did the LEAs complete?

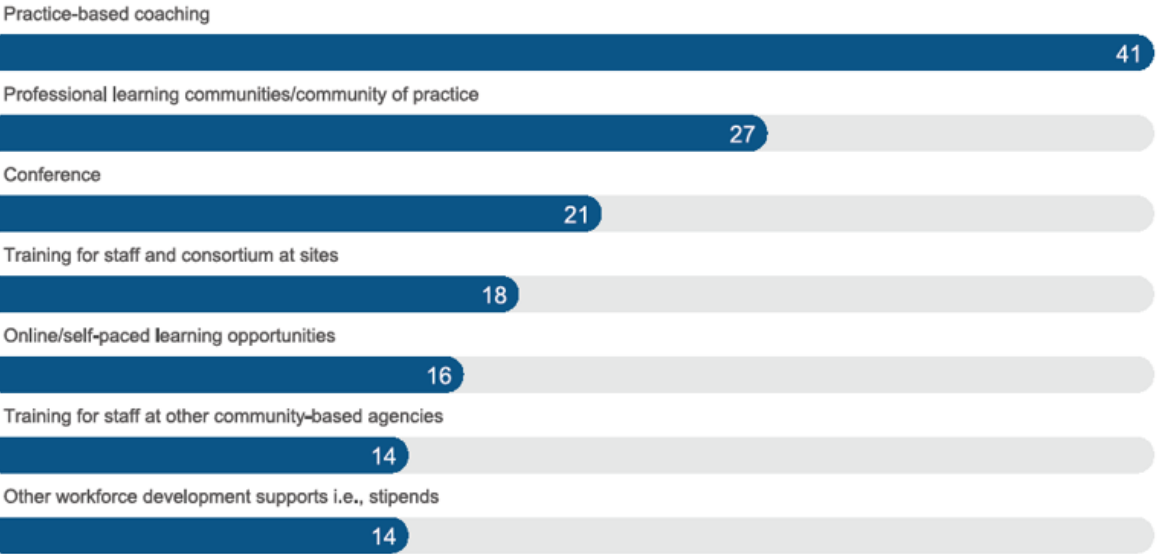


Figure 4: Grantees involvement in professional development activities in late 2025

Sites took a multiformat approach to professional development, combining individualized supports such as practice-based coaching with other training formats. Notably, all 41 grantees offering practice-based coaching also offered additional professional development opportunities. Site visits also showed differences in how professional development offerings are structured. Some grantees, particularly those with prior IIEEP experience, had more established systems in place, such as asynchronous online training, which was offered by 16 grantees, and helped maintain consistent training despite staff turnover. Others are actively developing systems to improve training access and participation, balancing the realities of limited staff time. Though the overall structure and delivery of professional development varies across grantees, much progress has been made to provide staff with training to promote high-quality, inclusive care.

Facility Renovations and Adaptive Equipment

Grantees are progressing on renovating facilities and purchasing adaptive equipment, with much of this progress occurring in late 2025. Among completed renovation projects, improvements were made to playground structures, ramps, classrooms, and bathrooms, with additional sites reporting that further renovations are underway. At sites, including the one pictured below, children were seen actively using newly accessible playgrounds, engaging alongside their peers in spaces that had been intentionally redesigned to support all students.



Along with renovation efforts, grantees reported purchasing adaptive equipment for indoor and outdoor learning environments, including sensory materials, instructional supports, and universally designed tools. Across classrooms, the impact of these purchases were visible in daily routines. For example, use of cube chairs or fidgets was frequently observed to support children who had difficulty participating in group time. This allowed them to remain engaged alongside their peers. In several classrooms, use of communication tools or devices was also observed. These tools provided children with limited or no spoken language with a means of expressing their needs or preferences. In these ways, adaptive equipment has promoted deeper engagement while also supporting the development of relationships and communication skills.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Challenges Observed Across Sites

Alongside early successes, some grantees are encountering challenges with implementation. Conversations with site directors, teachers, and grant leaders shed light on the day-to-day realities of their work and how these challenges are impacting planned grant activities.

- A commonly cited challenge was ensuring consistent staff participation in professional development, with many sites pointing to staffing constraints, scheduling limitations, and low uptake as contributing factors. These experiences align with biannual reporting in late 2025, where 33 of 58 grantees (57%)

identified staff participation in professional development (PD) as an ongoing challenge.

- Beyond logistical barriers, 19 grantees navigated resistance to inclusion among staff and, to a lesser extent, families. Sites new to co-teaching models faced additional complexity, with compensation disparities, perceptions of increased responsibility, and the adjustment to shared leadership all contributing to tension among staff.
- While many sites are making progress with facility renovations, the time-intensive nature of renovation projects was commonly cited as a challenge, with 20% of grantees with renovation plans falling behind schedule while navigating planning, approvals, and shifting timelines.
- Additional challenges included staffing shortages and licensing constraints that affected program operations. Plus, the ongoing expansion of Transitional Kindergarten (TK) also presented enrollment challenges at some sites, as families opted for TK placements over grantee programs.

Strategies to Address Challenges

Grantees are actively responding to these challenges. In response to low participation in professional development, grant leads described surveying staff to better understand barriers and adjust training formats, schedules, or offerings accordingly. Proposed solutions included introducing stipends and offering more flexible scheduling options, such as holding training during the workday, to increase access and participation. For more complex challenges, such as shifting staff perceptions around inclusion or implementing co-teaching models, site leaders acknowledged that progress takes time, often describing these efforts as part of early “growing pains” as programs move toward more inclusive practices. In the area of facility renovations, some grantees reported the need to pivot plans or adjust timelines, recognizing that renovation work can be slower and more complex than initially anticipated.

BRIGHT SPOTS

Despite the challenges described above, sites also demonstrated promising bright spots in three key areas: growing staff confidence in implementing inclusive practices, positive family experiences and feedback, and a focus on long-term sustainability.

“ [IEEEP] guidance made it easier for me to stay involved and support my child’s progress. — Parent feedback

STAFF CONFIDENCE

Across conversations with educators and program leaders, a consistent theme emerged: staff are growing more confident in their ability to support children with diverse needs. As one grantee observed, there has been “an increase in capacity and confidence of the providers, of the staff working directly with the children and families.” This confidence was visible during classroom observations, where teachers were more willing to try new strategies, adjust supports in the moment, and engage children with more significant needs alongside their peers.

This shift in confidence appears to be enabling broader access. Grantee-reported data from late 2025 indicates that 15 sites expanded access to serve children with more significant disabilities which is a meaningful development that suggests staff are not only gaining knowledge through professional development, but also translating that knowledge into practice. Together, these findings point to a reinforcing cycle: as staff confidence grows, programs are better positioned to serve a wider range of children, which in turn deepens staff experience and capacity.

FAMILY IMPACT

Though some families initially had reservations about enrolling their child at a childcare program, their experiences in IEEEP programs emerged as a strong bright spot. Across listening circles held at 20 sites, along with supplemental surveys, families appreciatively described frequent communication with staff. This included informal updates at pick-up as well as more formal communication through platforms like Learning Genie and Class Dojo. Families also described being guided through the individualized education program (IEP) process, receiving regular updates on milestones, and having opportunities to participate in intervention planning meetings. This support for communication helps families feel more informed and involved in their child’s development.

Families also expressed appreciation for the strategies and resources shared to support their child’s development at home. Families described receiving tools such as calming strategies, transition techniques, and communication cards. One parent shared that “guidance made it easier for me to stay involved and support my child’s progress.” This combination of communication and support played an important role in fostering trust and appreciation for their child’s experience in an inclusive classroom.

SUSTAINABILITY

Although grant funding extends through 2027, early signs point to a focus on sustainability. Discussions with site leaders highlighted an emphasis on building systems and practices that can be maintained beyond the grant period. Biannual reporting reflects this focus, with grantees describing activities such as developing new inclusion resources (20), adopting co-teaching models (18), and collecting data to guide ongoing improvement (24). In addition, nearly all grantees (98%) reported that they are on track to sustain inclusive practices. These efforts suggest that many are intentionally building on current activities to sustain inclusive practices beyond the grant period.

LOOKING AHEAD: NEXT PHASES FOR THE GRANT

This first annual implementation scan provides an understanding of how grantees are progressing through the IEEEP 2023–27 grant. While sites may vary in classroom structure and implementation activities, they share a clear commitment to advancing inclusive practices and expanding access for children with disabilities. In early visits, grantees were primarily engaged in foundational work, including building partnerships, designing professional development plans, and in some cases planning for adaptive equipment purchases and facility renovations. Spring 2026 site visits reflect a clear shift from planning to early implementation, with grant-funded activities now visible in classroom practices, staffing structures, and learning environments.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the grant will likely deepen and expand this work. Continued growth is expected in both the availability of professional development opportunities and educator participation, particularly in job-embedded coaching. Further progress in facilities and adaptive infrastructure will also remain important, as sites continue to expand the accessibility of learning environments. Future evaluation activities will center on assessing progress in these key areas. Together, qualitative and quantitative data sources, including site visits, stakeholder interviews, surveys, and biannual reporting, will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how these efforts are progressing and supporting high-quality inclusive care. A third round of site visits in Spring 2027, spanning 16 additional sites across California, will particularly be helpful in understanding how grant activities are shaping the way that inclusive care is being experienced.



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