

NPDCI State Work: Real World Applications - the Development and Purpose of the Delaware MAPS to Inclusion

Samtra Devard describes a planning tool developed in Delaware to assist families and individuals who work with young children in finding the way to high quality early childhood inclusion.



Samtra K. Devard, Wife of Leonard and Mother of Three – Lauren, Samuel, and Solomon

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

How do you think you can use Delaware MAPS to Inclusion to help ensure a high quality inclusive experience for your child with a disability? How can we use this tool to empower families to begin the journey of including their child with a disability in early care and education or community programs?

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All of my three children couldn't wait to open the new Twister game they just received for Christmas. We spread the game out on the floor and were ready to go. The game is pretty straightforward. You spin the pointer to determine where you place your hands and feet. Left hand red. Right foot blue. The kids were having a lot of fun. Except for one thing, my daughter with a disability was not equipped to follow the verbal instructions. She knows her colors. She knows her body parts. She needed some help with deciding which hand or foot she should place on which circle and at what time. She would definitely get twisted, but not meaningfully. One thing was

certain – we wanted her to play and have as much fun as her brothers. We could have let her continue without ever bringing quality to her play, but that is not a high enough standard. We wanted her to play so that the experience was not only fun, but meaningful and of high quality.

My husband found some address labels and a marker. In big letters, he wrote out two big R's and two big L's. He placed one of the L's on her left hand and another on her left foot. He then placed one of the R's on her right hand and the other on her right foot. He then tested out this accommodation to see if our daughter could play the game alongside of her brothers as intended, in addition to having fun. It worked. The instruction left hand blue was immediately followed with the appropriate action by our daughter and a level of skill that enabled her to be meaningfully included. We had so much fun!

A classroom, a community program and the world can be like a game of Twister when trying to include children with disabilities. Many times the basic question, can this child access this activity, this program, this school or the world around them never receives an affirmative answer. In other cases, when there is access, the quality of how the child participates is poor. Often, the stakeholders who are essential to making sure that an inclusive experience is of high quality find themselves twisted, without ever making sure they made the experience meaningful for the child with a disability.

Delaware's MAPS to Inclusion was created to help families get their child with a disability into the game and to provide some guideposts about what to do once there. Families in partnership with the professionals who service the venue that they are trying to access can make sure that access is granted, and that participation is meaningful, and that administrative supports are put in place to ensure that the experience is of high quality. Kristin Wilson, Inclusion Facilitator for Delaware's Birth to Three Program, says she would definitely share this tool with families and likes the family worksheets and checklists that empower families about what they can do. She saw this being a useful tool for childcare centers to increase access of children with disabilities in community settings.

About the Author: Samtra is devoted to her family and uses her personal experiences to advocate for systems change on behalf of ALL children and their families. Samtra promotes change and solves issues according to the belief that by hearing families with openness, passion and empathy – partnerships are created and success can be achieved. Samtra is passionate about the message of HOPE because it empowers parents like herself to be strong and confident advocates; and provides a way for professionals to connect with families to accomplish shared goals. Samtra holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Chemical Engineering from Drexel University.

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