



## **Least Restrictive Environment Spotlight on California: Creative Inclusion Program Options**

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Through the auspices of the SEEDS Project, Sacramento County Office of Education supported by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, these stories, available exclusively on the SEEDS website, highlight the efforts of Visitation Sites or Local Education Agencies providing exemplary models of system change efforts to increase inclusive options for young children with disabilities in preschool programs. The stories provide a glimpse into the process by which each program generated new ideas to influence change in their communities serving young children. Although each program offers a distinct approach to increasing inclusive opportunities in their locales, there are key indicators evident across programs. These considerations are reflective in guidance for interagency collaborative practice (Interagency Collaboration Handbook, 2007).

- Administrative support and involvement at the superintendent level
- Philosophical statement (mission, vision) for inclusion
- Models of inclusion
- Flexible staff
- Program Manager as lead to the collaborative initiative
- Developing and Implementing an Action Plan for Success
- Fiscal support
- Professional Development
- Resources
- Public Awareness
- Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

With the interagency collaborative approach as a framework, the stories that unfold capture each program's people and efforts to better serve all children in CA communities. Enjoy the stories and browse through the SEEDS Web site to select, receive technical assistance support, and apply one or more of the models in your programs.

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**SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY**

**INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL STORY**

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**C.L.O.U.D.S Preschool Program,  
Etiwanda Elementary School District**

**Inclusive Preschool Model**

## Background

The following story highlights the efforts of a school district program to increase inclusive opportunities for young children with disabilities and their families. The story reviews the process of change embarked upon by Etiwanda School District staff to create an inclusive vision of service delivery. In addition to describing the indicators of success toward building an inclusive learning community, the story provides information about how a school district was able to access a short-term technical assistance offering to help solidify the program's initial concept and develop a workable action plan for change.

For more information, please visit the SEEDS website at [www.scoe.net/seeds](http://www.scoe.net/seeds).

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## Introduction

Creating Learning Opportunities and Understanding Differences in Students (C.L.O.U.D.S.) is located at Perdew Elementary School, Etiwanda Elementary School District, San Bernardino County, not far from Ontario, CA. C.L.O.U.D.S. is a pioneering preschool inclusion program offering special education and general education preschool students an opportunity to learn together using a collaborative approach to teaching and learning. The overall school district motto and culture is “Excellence in Education” which promotes innovative and evidenced based programs for all children attending their schools. In 2008, C.L.O.U.D.S. received the Golden Bell award in Education from the CA School Board’s special education category recognizing excellence in education in CA. In 2009, Jack O’Connell, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, presented the C.L.O.U.D.S. program with the Grazer Outstanding Achievement in Learning (GOAL) award of \$5,000 (Jung, 2009) a testimony to the success of the program. The CA commission on special education created the GOAL award in 2005-2006 from funding received from Brian Grazer, a Hollywood producer who provided \$100,000 over a ten-year period to recognize innovative special education programs. The story that follows shares the development of the C.L.O.U.D.S. program and the supports that helped the creators move the project from inception to completion as well as State level recognition. In addition to reviewing program newsletters, a parent handbook, website links, and news releases, SEEDS staff interviewed Kristin Ludovico onsite and visited the C.L.O.U.D.S. classrooms. Additionally, Jan Kearns, SEEDS Core Consultant, participated in a phone interview about her work with the program. Her story is highlighted in a separate document.

In 2003, Samantha Pellitteri, Psy.D., School Psychologist, Kristin Ludovico, MS, CCC-SLP, Speech and language Pathologist, currently the program coordinator, and Sharon Coffield, Teacher, worked together to examine the services provided to young children with disabilities. At the time, infants and toddlers exiting early intervention programs received evaluations at three years of age and services would then be provided by county run programs which were self-contained classrooms with access to peer models from an onsite Parks and Recreation program. At the initial IEP, families asked where typical children attended preschool. Some families were concerned about the readiness level of their child for general education preschool programs. The parents’ queries prompted the program staff to think about other potential inclusion options that might be offered at the district level. Samantha and Kristin along with the support of Sharon, created a full inclusion vision for their district to consider. A SEEDS consultant visited them next to assist in bringing their vision into action.

## SEEDS Consultation

C.L.O.U.D.S. was board approved in 2005. Prior to board approval SEEDS received a request for TA support concerning the systems change initiative. Catharine Mikitka, MA, SEEDS program specialist received the request in December 2004. At the time Cathy noted in the TA plan that the school district staff had observed several preschool programs and consulted with private preschool representatives about how to create a preschool program. The staff was working on a vision, mission and overall program development. Cathy assigned Jan Kearns, MA, SEEDS Core Consultant to assist the Etiwanda team in their program assessment and planning. Jan provided two separate onsite TA meetings in March and May of 2005. She worked directly with Samantha and Kristin on streamlining their systems change plan for building inclusive opportunities in their locale.

Jan's consultant action plan included planning a timeline and next steps to operating a preschool program in the Fall of 2005 and working with the cabinet in determining final approval to proceed with the preschool program. Handouts included information on another program's director and teacher job descriptions. One of the outcomes of the TA was the superintendent and cabinet decided to open a director type position in response to proposed licensing requirements, to oversee the program and take the plan to the board for approval. Jan discussed the importance of creating a separate administrative position to manage the program as opposed to assigning the full duties to a site principal or offsite director. Jan provided information to include in the board proposal such as cost comparisons for individual daily child fees, classroom facility needs, classroom organization, daily schedules, and personnel costs and job descriptions. Jan attended and spoke at the cabinet meeting about the research evidence supporting inclusive programs and provided credibility and expert visibility to the more junior staff members presenting the concept. The program coordinator position was a direct result of the proposed director position and was finalized through the personnel process about a year after the proposal was officially approved. Kristin continues to act as Preschool Program Coordinator to date.

SEEDS participant evaluations revealed positive comments regarding Jan's consultation methodology. Her knowledge, expertise, and familiarity with systems change coupled with her pleasant and lighthearted manner in guiding the staff through their action plan were key factors in her success with the team. She provided ideas of how to approach community partners to collaborate on service provision, garner the support of cabinet members, and offer specific directions for program success.

## Program Highlights

From the beginning, Kristin has been involved as the program developer, implementer and administrator. She returned to school to receive her administrative services credential to be qualified for the coordinator position that was created to assure successful program operation. The program began as one class at the Alta Loma site

with one teacher, four instructional aides and a morning and afternoon class. The class operated four days per week with Friday as the planning/IEP day. The next year grew to two more sessions with teachers teaching back to back. A segregated class that coincided with the new inclusion class was dissolved after the first year. Under Kristin's leadership, the program moved to five days a week to be comparable to other general education preschool programs.

There are several unique operational components to the C.L.O.U.D.S. preschool design. Program staff first investigated licensing options through the Department of Social Services. Kristin applied for a licensing exemption by using legal supports documented in Ed Code and IDEA regarding the requirement to provide preschool options within the least restrictive environment. The license exemption allows the program to operate under the auspices of the school site and follows Title V regulations for classrooms. The program is now housed at an elementary school campus and offers six morning sessions and five afternoon sessions. A teacher mentoring option was created where the veteran teacher responsible for the sixth morning session is involved in coaching, curricular development and classroom support in the afternoons. Lastly, the program purchased five buses, which was less costly than contracting out for them. The program provides transportation for students to attend morning and afternoon sessions and any other location as long as it is within district boundaries.

Kristin emphasizes the key to the overall success and continuation of the program rests with the community and school culture that promotes a family centered and collaborative approach to service provision. The "Etiwanda Way" as it is referred to, is a belief in providing the best services available that will benefit the family, school and community. The program proposal and philosophy developed initially, and the ongoing nature of the full inclusion preschool option continues to grow and be nurtured by administrators, staff and families alike because it fits with the overall mission of the school that emphasizes "Excellence in Education". By building and adhering to a program vision that parallels the school district's commitment to education assures that C.L.O.U.D.S. is fully supported by both school and community members.

Now that C.L.O.U.D.S. has been in operation for four years, Kristin plans to shift her focus from internal program development to exploring external program supports for staff development opportunities and public awareness such as attending regional CPIN meetings, and participating in the annual SEECAP Institutes, First Five forums, and leadership training events. Additionally, Kristin plans to allocate more time toward investigating outcome measurement results obtained from required Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) assessments, to enhance their continuous improvement methodologies impacting both positive student outcomes and increased program effectiveness. Lastly, staff is reaching out to district staff to increase the awareness of the benefits to inclusive education. Invitations are sent out to receiving Kindergarten teachers to attend the spring transition meetings. Goals are collaboratively discussed and teachers visit the preschool classrooms to observe the prerequisite skills the



children are learning for Kindergarten. The staff emphasizes such skills as lining up and circle time even if they may not yet know their letters and numbers. Kindergarten teachers are provided with a toolkit for each child transitioning to Kindergarten that includes work samples, pictures of the child in a success memory book, a timer, social stories, picture schedules, manipulatives and other curricular adaptations. Kindergarten teachers are also invited to various training events.

### **Program Recommendations**

When asked “What is unique about the C.L.O.U.D.S. program, Kristin indicated the following: 1) a vision of inclusion; 2) relationships with families; 3) getting to know families at one central site; and 4) focus on accountability where the program coordinator regularly visits classrooms to observe teacher documentation strategies. In comparison, Kristin indicated that there are some things she might have done differently including: 1) not grow so quickly; 2) redo facilities to include restrooms in the classrooms; 3) provide computers in each classroom at the beginning; 4) make sure to hire staff that are dedicated to the vision of the program; and 5) ask for help from others early on in the program development. She recommends to others contemplating a systems change effort toward inclusion to: 1) form a team of people to delegate various program development responsibilities immediately; 2) create your inclusion picture first including the vision, and goals with the help of a team facilitator or consultant; 3) identify who in the program can assist with the budget development, personnel, purchasing of materials, curriculum selection, child nutrition needs, among others. Try and keep your group manageable and start delegating tasks immediately. Schedule enough time for planning and reflection. The team needs to partner with the site principal at the beginning to establish a long term working relationship.

Kristin believes it is imperative to keep parents involved in the effort every step of the way. Her mantra is “no surprises”. Staff work collaboratively and include all involved parties in developing educational objectives for each child. Parents of typically developing children are excited about the program and appreciate the opportunity for their children to learn in an enriched preschool environment with skilled professionals and para-professionals. Kindergarten teachers notice the children who come from C.L.O.U.D.S. because they are the ones prepared to participate upon entry.



## Summary

The approach and belief shared by all program staff reflects back to the community and organizational culture of inclusion. The “Etiwanda Way” where families and children come first and staff collaborate to foster the community mission, provides a framework for systems change that all programs need to consider. When embarking on a process of seeking out innovative practices that promote the concept of full inclusion, all stakeholders must embrace the idea for change. The C.L.O.U.D.S. preschool program provides one example of how a small group of dedicated individuals, garnered with the support of the administration and the community, successfully implemented a change to a more inclusive service model. The catalyst for change came from the program staff seeking out new ways of improving services for children with disabilities and their families. The SEEDS project Core Consultant approach offered a low cost way of guiding the local change agents toward successful program implementation. This story highlights the success of the effort and provides a background for others to consider when formulating a new way of doing business for the benefit of children and families.

The next section provides a template of the change process action plan included in the Etiwanda process. Lastly, the final segment of the story lists an outline of the specific inclusion program components, as they exist today.



## **Model Components- How did you do it?**

### ***Administrative support and involvement at the superintendent level***

The administrative unit's commitment to the systems change was key to the success of the initiative. Without the support of the administration and board members, the proposal would not have been accepted and implemented. Kristin received assistance and support from the Shawn Judson, Ed.D., Superintendent from conception to implementation. The Superintendent attended a workshop on licensing when exploring how to address the issue. Sylvia Kordich, currently an assistant superintendent, was the administrator of special programs at the time the plan was in development. Jean Martin, Ph.D., director of special programs (previously titled administrator of special programs) as direct program supervisor, continues to lend support and guidance to the program staff.

### ***Philosophical statement (mission, vision) for inclusion***

Kristin and Samantha created the vision and mission statement. They visited other preschool program models in the State to gain insight into possible full inclusion approaches. Originally they wanted a classroom with ten general education students and five students with special needs but could not fiscally support the lower ratio. The vision was created and then presented to other staff members who supported the concept. The duo sought out other staff members with similar visions for serving young children with disabilities.

### ***Models of inclusion***

Full inclusion; differentiated instruction in rotating centers using Handwriting without Tears, Houghton-Mifflin preschool, Ready Set Go Motor Curriculum, and Creative Curriculum. Rancho Cucamonga Fire District provides safety toolkits and presents special training on risk watch-safety awareness.

### ***Flexible staff***

The staff is relatively young with one veteran teacher available for consultation. The staff is itinerant except for one speech and language pathologist (SLP). Physical therapy (PT) and vision are county programs but the services are provided onsite. A speech nook is available for one-on-one therapy if needed. There are teacher/assistant teams and Kristin is working on creating two 15-minute meeting slots for planning purposes.

***Program Manager as lead to the collaborative initiative***

Kristin as program coordinator (.85 FTE) is familiar with all aspects of the program. She delegates “tasks not responsibility” and can be found conducting teacher evaluations at one moment and vacuuming classrooms at the end of the school day at another moment. In addition to Kristin, a vice principal (.30 FTE), works daily from 12:15 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. to conduct daily classroom walk throughs, participate in IEP meetings (185 IEPs last year), formulate the duty schedule, and act as safety supervisor.

***Developing and implementing an action plan for success***

Kristin outlines annual goals and budget needs. Kristin works directly with the Superintendent and the Director to get approval and seeks out input from all staff.

***Fiscal support***

Kristin accessed the district accounting office when initially preparing the first proposed budget. Teams must access all district level and SELPA supports when creating a systems change effort and recognize everyone that helped to achieve the mission. She provides annual cost avoidance summaries on the number of children served and what the fee for service would have been if received through the county or other NPA. She brought snacks for every employee in the fiscal office to acknowledge their support and enjoys surprising her staff with treats to recognize their dedication and contributions to the program.

***Professional development***

Aides are paid an additional hour to attend onsite training events usually hosted by the SELPA including an eight-week training on parent involvement and parenting skills. The SELPA will provide district training onsite if the program can assure that 10 -15 people will attend. The SELPA offers topics such as social stories and behavioral intervention.

***Resources***

Kristin describes herself as the key program resource. She ordered and purchased every classroom item personally. She emphasizes the need to be in the classroom to empower staff and parents and not always in the office completing paperwork. Early on Kristin completed the enrollment process, provided speech therapy and conducted teacher evaluations as well. Now with the addition of the vice principal, she has time to devote to teacher support in the classroom and exploring external resources for training. Some of the federal stimulus money will be used for training purposes. The Child Development Specialist on staff visits families to bridge the transition from infant to preschool and provides teacher support in curriculum implementation. Kindergarten teachers are



invited to trainings to show that preschool teaches prerequisite skills to be successful in Kindergarten and employs a pre-academic curriculum.

### ***Public awareness***

C.L.O.U.D.S. held an open house last year that included a book fair and open classrooms for community visitation and district teachers during their prep time. Kristin has presented to the MOCHA Moms (Mothers of Color) for two years in a row to talk about inclusion and early intervention. Staff wear C.L.O.U.D.S. T-shirts and are considering the purchase of Purdew Elementary shirts if they continue to reside at this new campus.

### ***Evaluation and continuous improvement***

Kristin provides an annual cost benefit analysis to the Superintendent. She plans to compile and disaggregate DRDP data on preschool learning outcomes from preschool to third grade and compare the results to children that did not attend C.L.O.U.D.S. Parents complete surveys from the district level at transition from preschool to Kindergarten.



## Statistics

### Number of children served per year

200 students are served with a wait list of 45 general education students. The program offers part time slots or modified schedules to general education students such as alternate day attendance allowing for more families to participate in the program.

### Number and type of staff required for program functioning

11 sessions; 8-9 children with disabilities maximum per session; program director and coordinator. There are morning and afternoon sessions available from 7:45 am to 10:45 am and 11:05 am to 2:05 pm following the school district calendar. Students may attend only a morning or afternoon session and either; attend part time or full week sessions. The staff includes a teaching vice principal, preschool program coordinator, secretary, three consulting psychologists, 1.5 FTE speech and language pathologists and one speech and language pathologist assistant, eight early childhood special education teachers, three early childhood teachers, one child development specialist, and twenty-two instructional aides.

### Number of interagency committees to support the effort

None.

### Number of MOUs and with which agencies

There is an MOU with the teacher's union for early release days for teachers and a required MOU with the SELPA including related services provisions such as PT and vision specialists.

### Number of agency representatives involved in the initiative

All C.L.O.U.D.S. program members are from the district.

### Number of meetings required for planning and implementation annually

None. Kristin completes the budget and program proposal that is submitted to the director.

### Types of resources needed to support staff development

Staff participates in SELPA sponsored training events. Staff attend nationally sponsored conferences such as ASHA and CAEYC annually. Staff is involved in the professional development center activities provided by the district including BTSA.

### Total costs of an inclusion program option

The fee is \$15 per child per session for general education students; no costs for a child with an IEP. The program operates with a 1.3 million dollar annual budget. The total cost savings from operating a district preschool program-\$770,000 in 2008-2009.

### Other

A program website provides an introduction to the program, the parent registration forms and curricular activities for downloading. [www.etiwanda.org/preschool](http://www.etiwanda.org/preschool).