

Expanding Opportunities

for Young Children with Disabilities and their Families through State-Wide Interagency Efforts

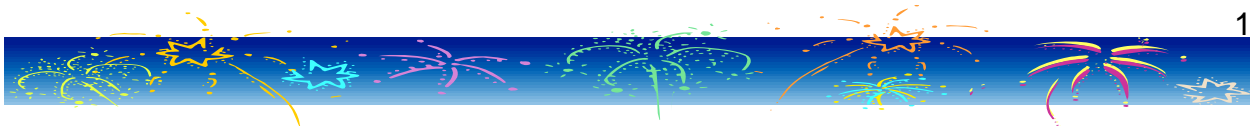
An Overview:

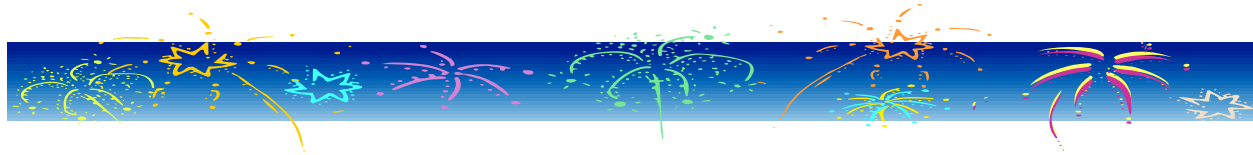
Expanding Opportunities for Inclusion is a federally funded initiative designed to build on existing state efforts to improve inclusive opportunities for young children with disabilities and their families. The Expanding Opportunities initiative is an interagency collaboration among the Office of Head Start, Child Care Bureau, and Administration on Developmental Disabilities in the Department of Health and Human Services; and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in the Department of Education. Interagency technical assistance to support this initiative will be provided by the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC), The National Child Care and Information System (NCCIC), the Head Start Quality Initiative TA and the Northeast Regional Resource Center (NERRC). The focus of this work is state team/systems level collaborative planning to support current and future efforts to expand inclusion for young children in the state. Involvement with the Expanding Opportunities initiative provides states with support from the federal agency technical assistance consultants for 1 year through both on-site and distance technology consultation, meeting facilitation and resource sharing.

Maine was nominated as one of the three states to participate in the *Fourth Annual Expanding Opportunities for Inclusion Pre-Institute State Planning Days* held in Chapel Hill North Carolina on July 21 & 22, 2008. The states selected were asked to identify cross-agency teams to participate in the institute and continue to work with the team and on selected priorities in this area. *Maine's Expanding Opportunities Early Childhood Inclusion Team* consisted of Debra Hannigan, Maine Department of Education Child Development Services Director, Carolyn Drugge, Maine Department of Health & Human Services Child Care Administrator and State Head Start Collaboration Director, Angela Faherty, Maine Department of Education Associate Commissioner, Cindy Brown, Child Development Regional Site Director and Linda Labas, Early Childhood Coordinator at the University of Maine Center for Community Inclusion & Disability Studies.

Maine was selected to participate because of our recognized strides in the area of inclusive early care and education (professional development and technical assistance cross-department efforts, SpecialQuest birth to five, Map to Inclusive Child Care State Grant (2000) etc).

During the Pre-Institute, *Maine's Expanding Opportunities Early Childhood Inclusion Team* met to begin a strategic planning process including a review of our efforts in this





area. We worked with the federal agency technical assistance consultants to create a vision statement as well as to review current initiatives, identify strengths and continued challenges, identify other stakeholders and partners and determine next steps for proceeding as an interagency group to support inclusive services. Our plan included identifying specific follow-up dates for continued work by this initial core team, as well as a date to bring into the state our representative federal technical assistance consultants and a larger stakeholder group to share this information and invite further input and recommendations. We tentatively planned for this to be a two-day event held in Augusta on September 30 and October 1, 2008.

We feel this initiative provides a unique opportunity for Maine to obtain collaborative technical assistance across federal agencies to assist and support our efforts in building high quality interagency inclusive programs for young children with disabilities and their families. For more complete background information about Expanding Opportunities and the beginning work of the Maine team developed at the Pre-Institute, please see the attached documents. For more information about Expanding Opportunities visit <http://www.nectac.org/expopps/default.asp>

