



Foundations for Success

Young children are being suspended and expelled from early childhood educational programs at an alarming rate. Recent studies have shown that 1 in 6 autistic children have been removed from their early education setting! The skills taught during these early years are the foundation of a child's educational future. Excluded children miss out on critical early learning opportunities that help them be socially, emotionally and academically ready for kindergarten.

Foundations for Success aims to support all children attending DHS licensed childcare programs with a focus on the challenging behaviors often exhibited by children who are later given an autism spectrum diagnosis. This program will offer materials, professional development, and on-going collaborations between early learning programs, families, and supportive agencies.

The Foundations for Success program focuses on the early education setting and helping teachers positively support children with autism. The most wonderful part of this program is that the tools and strategies that focus on autism can be transferred to children with ADHD, ODD, or that might just be having a rough day. Many staff are being placed in classrooms with nothing more than a high school diploma. The staff do not have the education or experience to help, not only autistic children, but all the children in their classrooms who are struggling. The Foundations for Success program offers a multi-tiered approach to easing these struggles and lessening the instances of suspension and expulsion in early childhood education.

This program will begin with 30 classroom sensory calming kits and 2 professional development days. It will focus on children 2-5 years old, transitional preschool, preschool, and pre-kindergarten classrooms. Luzerne County programs will be given an opportunity to apply to be a part of the program. The application process will ask programs to share their demographic data (i.e. number of staff, number of children enrolled, age groups served, additional funding sources). Programs will be given supplies for one classroom. However, they will be able to send teaching staff from more than one classroom to the professional development days. Leadership staff will attend the first professional development day that will focus not only on supporting the children and families but also supporting the teaching staff at their program. This first session will ensure the "buy-in" from the administration. The second professional development day will be all about how the teachers can use the tools being provided to the program to support the children in their care. They will receive valuable information about research based social-emotional tools that can help these children process their very big emotions. It will help teachers understand ways to de-escalate a situation and offer a calming area instead of an over-stimulating space. Programs will be able to build relationships with Parenting Autism United and with each other. By supplying these materials and training days to 30 programs, we can support not only children currently enrolled but those that will enroll next year and each year after. We are providing not just handheld tools but knowledge as well. This is about bettering a teacher's toolbox to support the children they care for each day.