

Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) Program Implementation

Readiness and Reflection Questions



The Road Map to DECA Implementation

The Devereux Center for Resilient Children (DCRC) is committed to supporting programs successfully implement resilience resources that promote the healthy social and emotional development of children. The contours of successful implementation should take into consideration everything from financial planning, time management, staff wellness, team “buy-in” as well as culturally responsive and sustaining approaches. The following tool is specifically designed to help program leaders reflect on important questions that should be thought about and discussed to ensure successful implementation. The tool has two parts, including:

- A. Implementation **Readiness** Questions – designed for leaders to reflect on in advance of initial implementation; and
- B. Implementation **Reflection** Questions – questions for leaders and staff to discuss as early as possible into the implementation process.

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A. Implementation Readiness Questions: Getting Started

Undertaking the successful implementation of any new resource requires planning and discussion, ensuring that team members understand roles, responsibilities, budget implications, time commitments, etc. The following questions should be reviewed prior to making the commitment to implement the DECA Program. The DECA Program Implementation Guide can be made available upon request to assist you in answering the following questions (*Reference: DECA Strategies Guides Chapter 3*).

1. Has a leader (or leadership team) been identified to oversee DECA Program implementation and are roles and responsibilities related to the project clearly articulated? (Roles and responsibilities may vary. A better understanding of the roles and responsibilities required will be more evident as leaders review the Implementation Reflection Questions.)
2. Has the leadership team discussed and determined whether the DECA Program will be implemented universally (with all children) and in its comprehensive five-step approach, or as a targeted intervention with select children and only using specific resources? (For more information to help answer this question, please review the DECA Program Implementation Guide and the Implementation Reflection Questions that clearly outline the DECA Program five-step process and associated resources.)
3. Has the leadership team decided on a professional development plan for effective DECA Program implementation? (DECA Overview Training, DECA Coaching Best Practices Training, advanced training and technical assistance.)
4. Does the leadership team understand what DECA Program resources are needed for implementation and the costs associated? Has a decision about e-DECA (web-based assessment) vs. paper been made?
5. How will staff have access to all of the DECA Program resources necessary? (Including assessment forms, Strategies Guides, computer access for e-DECA users, etc.) If staff are sharing resources, are they clear on how to access resources when needed?
6. Does staff know about the program's decision to implement the DECA Program and do they understand the goals and objectives for choosing the DECA Program? (For assistance in helping educate staff about the DECA Program and to inspire a commitment to resilience, consider sharing videos and resources from the Devereux Center for Resilient Children website www.centerforresilientchildren.org.)
7. Have decisions been made about family partnership in the DECA Program? (Programs should consider whether parents will be asked to provide ratings of their child.) How will parents receive information about the DECA Program? (Letters, posters, bulletin boards, parent night.)
8. Does the program have a commitment to culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE) practices that will ensure the equitable implementation of the DECA assessment and program? CRSE practices are grounded in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity are recognized and regarded as assets for teaching and learning.
9. Has the leadership team considered how to measure DECA Program implementation success? (Pre/post DECA ratings, staff development around social and emotional teaching, improved family partnership, reduction in behavior incidents, etc.)
10. Do you plan to use the *Building Your Bounce* / adult resilience resources to support and promote staff resilience throughout the entire DECA Program implementation process?

B. Implementation Reflection Questions

The following questions are important to reflect upon as early as possible in the implementation process. Some programs may want to review these questions at the same time as the readiness questions, while others may need to attend a DECA Program training before making some of these decisions. The questions are VERY detailed. This was done intentionally to help programs think about all aspects of the DECA Program from budget considerations and time management to staff moral and culturally responsive and sustaining education (CRSE) practices. CRSE practices are grounded in a cultural view of learning and human development in which multiple expressions of diversity are recognized and regarded as assets for teaching and learning. For more information on culturally responsive and sustaining practices check out:

- [NAEYC Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement](#)
- [ZERO to THREE – The ABCs of Diversity and Inclusion](#)
- [Bank Street College center on Culture, Race and Equity](#)
- [Start Early - Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the Early Childhood Classroom](#)
- [CASEL - How Does SEL Support Educational Equity and Excellence?](#)
- [Creating Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Classrooms](#)
- [Culturally Responsive Teaching in Early Childhood Education](#)

**It is important to remember that the DECA Program was designed to fit within already existing systems. Some programs may decide to implement all of the DECA Program while others will only select certain elements to enhance practices that are already in place.*



Step 1 – Collect Information

During Step 1, you will collect important information about individual children and current teaching/caregiving practices. You will use this information to complete the DECA and identify opportunities to improve teaching practices. In this step, you will get to know each child and family, conduct observations and complete the Reflective Checklist(s).

Get to Know Each Child and Family

1. Family partnerships begin to develop from the very first interactions. There are a number of ways to get know children and families. From formal to informal conversations, families provide a key source of information about a child's interests, abilities, strengths, health, development, learning style, culture, and other unique identity traits. How does your program get to know children and families? (The DECA program offers resources to support this step including optional Getting to Know Each Child Discussion Questions or Family Questionnaire. These resources may not be necessary if they duplicate what is in place.)
 - a. Does your program currently have systems in place to get to know children and families? Do you plan to continue with the existing methods or do you wish to adopt some of the DECA tools for getting to know children and families?
 - b. How will teachers and staff be supported in getting to know children and

families? (Professional development, time for home visitation or family meetings, time management ideas, staffing support, organizational systems and resources to assist with intake, etc.)

- c. How will staff be supported in developing partnerships with all families, including those who may have very different backgrounds or for whom making connections is challenging?
- d. How will staff be supported in reflecting on any bias that may interfere with their ability to connect with families in culturally affirming ways?
- e. How can the practice of meaningful resilience-focused family partnerships be supported throughout the year?

Observing Children

1. How does your program collect information on individual children and families? Do you wish to adopt additional tools to support your program efforts of getting to know children and families, or do you feel that your current practices are sound? (The DECA Program offers resources to support this step, but the resources may not be necessary if they duplicate what is already in place. It is critical that staff not be overburdened with additional forms but also that staff have collected sufficient information to inform Step 2 – Completing the DECA.)
 - a. Does your program currently do regular observations of children? Do you plan to continue with existing methods of observation or do you wish to adopt the DECA observation tool and/or method of running record observation?
 - b. How long do you plan to hold the initial observation phase? (A minimum of 4 weeks is required prior to completing an assessment.)
 - c. How many observations per child would you recommend for your teachers to complete prior to completing a DECA?
 - d. How will teachers be supported in completing the initial observation phase? (Time management ideas, staffing support, organizational systems and resources to assist with observation, etc.)
 - e. How can the practice of high quality (accurate, objective and complete) observation be supported throughout the year?
 - f. How will staff be supported in reflecting on any bias that may interfere with their ability to complete culturally responsive, accurate, objective and complete observations?
 - g. How will staff be celebrated when they engage in high quality observations?

Observing the Environment

2. Does your program have a tool already in place that you use to collect information about the social and emotional quality of the early childhood setting? (The DECA Program Reflective Checklist can be used for this purpose. If programs already have a tool in place, it is important to determine whether the DECA Program Reflective Checklist will also be completed.) If programs do decide to use the DECA Reflective Checklist, the following questions should be considered:
 - a. Will the Reflective Checklist be used for independent teacher use, joint use by teachers and supervisors, one at a time or all at once?
 - b. When do you plan to have the Reflective Checklist completed? (What is the timeframe, e.g., one Reflective Checklist per week/month, etc...)
 - c. How will teachers be supported in completing the Reflective Checklist? (Provide time for reflection, establish clear timelines, etc...)
 - d. How will staff be educated/supported in their understanding that culturally responsive and sustaining practices are an essential and integrated part of high quality social and emotional practices?
 - e. How can the practice of using the Reflective Checklist be supported throughout the year? (Reviewed in staff/team meetings and/or supervision.)
 - f. How will staff be celebrated when they engage in reflective practices around the social and emotional quality of their program?



Step 2 – Assess Each Child

During this step, staff will complete the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA). The DECA is also scored during this step.

1. Have you decided to assess every child or only select children?
2. Have you decided if teachers AND parents are both completing DECAs?
3. If a classroom has more than one teacher, have you decided who will conduct the DECA ratings (lead teacher conducts all ratings; class is split with each teacher conducting ratings, etc...)?
4. What is the program's plan to ensure that the DECA assessment (and all assessments) are implemented in a manner that reduces rater bias and advances equity efforts?
5. Have you decided if you will use paper DECA record forms or the online, web-based e-DECA system? If teachers are using e-DECA, have you determined how teachers will learn to access e-DECA with their unique ID and password?
6. What is your timeline for DECA completion by teachers (and parents)?
7. How and when will you inform teachers (and parents) of timelines and deadlines?
8. How will you engage teachers in education/information efforts to support high quality, culturally responsive and sustaining implementation of the DECA program? (Help teachers learn more about culturally responsive and sustaining practices and to address the thoughts and feelings that can bias assessment ratings and interventions for children and families.)
9. Who will be responsible for the parent/guardian education/information efforts? (Regarding the DECA Program in general as well as the assessment process and timeline.)
10. Do you need parent/guardian consent for teachers to complete the DECA on children? If yes, how do you plan to attain it? (See sample consent forms provided by the DECA Program.)
11. If parents/guardians are completing the DECA assessment on their children, how do you plan to get assessments completed and returned in a timely fashion? (On home visits or during pick-up and drop-off, a parent night, etc...)
12. How will administrators, staff and families be celebrated for completing DECA assessments and showing a commitment to children's resilience?



Step 3 – Summarize Results

During this step, you score the DECAs or review e-DECA reports, review or complete the Classroom/Group profile, prepare for group planning and prepare for individual child planning.

Questions for web-based e-DECA users:

1. Will staff be required to have paper print outs of e-DECA reports in each child's file or will they be stored electronically?
2. Has a system been put into place that will help ensure that DECA results are reviewed and reflected on vs. simply scored and filed?
3. How will you ensure that DECA data is interpreted in a strength-based way that incorporates multiple forms of information to create a well-rounded and culturally responsive and sustaining understanding of the child(ren)?
4. How will you monitor DECA data for trends that may reflect bias that impacts children and families who have been historically marginalized?
5. How will staff be asked to review and make meaning of DECA results? (Will meetings be held to reflect on results and/or will staff need to review results independently?)
6. How will staff be asked to review and make meaning of the Classroom/Group profiles? (Will meetings be held to reflect on results and/or will staff need to review results independently?)
7. How do you plan to share DECA results with parents/guardians in a culturally responsive and sustaining manner (letter, meeting, home visits) and who needs to be in attendance if a meeting is scheduled?

Questions for paper DECA users:

8. Who is responsible for hand scoring the DECA assessments?
9. How do you plan to support the hand scoring of DECA assessments?
10. What is the timeline for DECA assessment hand scoring?
11. Has a system been put into place that will help ensure that DECA results are reviewed and reflected on vs. simply scored and filed?
12. How will you ensure that DECA data is interpreted in a strength-based way that incorporates multiple forms of information to create a well-rounded and culturally responsive and sustaining understanding of the child(ren)?
13. How will you monitor DECA data for trends that may reflect bias that impacts children and families who have been historically marginalized?

14. How will staff be asked to review and make meaning of DECA results? (Will meetings be held to reflect on results and/or will staff need to review results independently?)
15. How will staff be asked to review and make meaning of the Classroom/Group profiles? (Will meetings be held to reflect on results and/or will staff need to review results independently?)
16. How do you plan to share DECA results with parents/guardians in a culturally responsive and sustaining manner (letter, meeting, home visits) and who needs to be in attendance if a meeting is scheduled?



Step 4 – Plan and Implement Strategies

During this step you will use the information you have collected along with your DECA results to create plans for the group and the individual child.

Group/Universal Planning

In the DECA Program, universal planning involves making social and emotional quality enhancements that benefit ALL children. This is done by using the DECA Reflective Checklist, the Classroom/Group Profile, the Group Action Planning form and the DECA Strategies Guide. Programs that have other quality improvement measures in place may choose NOT to use the DECA Program's approach to Group/Universal Planning, while others may use portions of it. Answer the questions below if your program intends to use the DECA Reflective Checklist and Group/Universal Strategies.

1. Will the Reflective Checklist be used for independent teacher use, joint use by teachers and supervisors, one at a time or all at once?
2. When do you plan to have the Reflective Checklist completed? (What is the timeframe, e.g., one Reflective Checklist per week/month, etc...)
3. How will teachers be supported in completing the Reflective Checklist? (Provide time for reflection, establish clear timelines, etc...)
4. How will staff be educated/supported in their understanding that culturally responsive and sustaining practices are an essential and integrated part of high quality social and emotional practices?
5. How can the practice of using the Reflective Checklist be supported throughout the year? (Reviewed in staff/team meetings and/or supervision.)
6. Will staff be asked to develop Group Action Plans for quality improvement based on their completed Reflective Checklist and Classroom/Group profile information?
7. What is the timeline for Group Action Plan completion?
8. Who and how will Group Action Plans be reviewed?
9. How will staff be supported in making ongoing quality improvements? (Completing the Reflective Checklists throughout the year, Group Action Planning throughout the year, reflective support throughout the year, etc...)
10. Does the program have a commitment to culturally responsive and sustaining practices that will ensure equitable universal planning?
11. How will staff be celebrated for making and implementing resilience-focused quality improvements?

Group/Universal Planning (that does not require specific use of the DECA planning resources)

1. Does your plan intend to enhance or modify lesson plans to include more of a focus on quality enhancements and protective factor building?
2. If your program plans to enhance or modify the lesson planning process, who will do it, when will it be done, how will it be trained, and how will it be supported?
3. Will someone be responsible for supporting teachers in enhancing their planning for better social emotional quality?
4. Will someone regularly review lesson plans (verbally or written) on their lesson planning efforts?
5. How will you support staff in merging other best practice, culturally responsive and sustaining practices, and curriculum tools with their DECA efforts?
6. What group planning resources do you plan to make available for staff (Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers book, revised lesson plans, etc.)?
7. How will staff be celebrated for making and implementing resilience-focused quality improvements?

Individual and Targeted Planning

In the DECA Program, individual and targeted planning both use a similar “Strengths, Goals, Strategies” approach. Individual planning refers to the process of developing individualized plans to strengthen protective factors in ALL children (even if the child’s DECA does not indicate an area of need). Individualizing to promote social and emotional growth is ideal and beneficial for all children, but is not always realistic given time and resource limitations.

Targeted planning refers to the process of developing targeted plans to strengthen protective factors and reduce behavior concerns for children with identified needs or concerns. A Strengths, Goals, Strategies planning approach can be used for both individual and targeted plans with an increase in the frequency, intensity and duration of the strategy/intervention used for targeted plans.

Individualized Planning

1. Do you plan to develop individual plans to promote social and emotional development for ALL children using:
 - a. e-DECA strategies and printable plans
 - b. The DECA Strength, Goals, Strategies paper planning process
 - c. Your program’s existing individualization protocol
2. If you plan to develop individual plans to promote social emotional development for ALL children, when will they be done? Who will be responsible for completing them? Where will the plans “live”? Who will review them?

3. How will the program's commitment to culturally responsive and sustaining practices be evident in the way individualized plans are developed for each child?
4. How can children from historically marginalized identity groups benefit from individualized plans that empower, affirm and celebrate their unique identities?
5. What resources do you plan to use in order to access strategies? (eDECA strategies, Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers book, Infant and Toddler Strategies Guides book, For Now and Forever parent resources, FLIP IT book, Socially Strong, Emotionally Secure book, other social emotional resources, etc...)
6. How will teachers be supported in implementing strategies?
7. Will individual plans include family input and be shared with parents/guardians? How will they be shared?
8. When will individual plans be re-evaluated and enhanced throughout the year? How will you know if the individualization planning process is working?
9. How will staff be celebrated for making and implementing individualized plans that promote social and emotional development?

Targeted Planning

1. Do you plan to develop targeted plans for children with identified needs or concerns using:
 - a. e-DECA strategies and printable plans
 - b. The DECA Strength, Goals, Strategies paper planning process
2. If you plan to develop targeted plans, how and who will identify children that may require more targeted level support? (Children with 1 or more protective factors scoring in the Area of Need range on the DECA, children whose teachers have concerns about behavior, etc...)
3. Will a collaborative meeting be held in order to develop the targeted plan (including parents/guardians and other professionals as needed)? Who will lead the meetings? Will you use the DECA Strengths, Goals, Strategies planning tool to help guide the meeting?
4. How will the program's commitment to culturally responsive and sustaining practices be evident in the way targeted plans are developed for each child?
5. How can children from historically marginalized identity groups benefit from targeted plans that are sensitive to the impact of system oppression while empowering, affirming and celebrating their unique identities?
6. What resources do you plan to use in order to access strategies? (e-DECA strategies, Promoting Resilience in Preschoolers book, Infant and Toddler Strategies Guides book,

For Now and Forever parent resources, FLIP IT book, Socially Strong, Emotionally Secure book, other social emotional resources, etc...)

7. How will teachers be supported in implementing strategies at a high frequency, intensity and duration?
8. How will targeted plans include family input and be shared with parents/guardians? Will home based goals and strategies be included in a collaborative planning process?
9. Will someone be responsible for supporting parents in home based strategies efforts?
10. When will targeted plans be re-evaluated and changed as needed? How will you know if the targeted plan is working or if you need an increased level of support?
11. What resources will you have available to offer children who need an increased level of support? (DECA Positive Guidance Planning resources and forms, mental health services, etc.
12. What systems do/will you have in place for children who consistently score in the area of need and behavior concern range on the DECA?
13. What systems do/will you have in place to ensure that policies pertaining to challenging behavior, suspension, modified attendance and expulsion are equitable and implemented in culturally responsive and sustaining ways?
14. How will staff be celebrated for making and implementing targeted plans for children with low protective factors and/or high behavioral concerns?



Step 5 – Review Progress and Adjust

During this step, you will monitor the effectiveness of group and individual child plans and adjust plans as needed.

1. What methods of evaluation do you plan to use (pre-post assessments, the Reflective Checklist, plans, staff and family feedback, etc...)?
2. Who will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the various methods of evaluation?
3. Are processes in place that will ensure outcome data is shared with the appropriate individuals (staff, families, funders)?
4. Are there processes in place that will ensure continuous quality improvements are made based on outcome data results?
5. How and who will monitor the progress of individual plans or targeted plans?
6. How will you ensure that DECA data is interpreted in a strength-based way that incorporates multiple forms of information to create a well-rounded and culturally responsive and sustaining understanding of the child(ren)?
7. How will you monitor and disaggregate DECA data for patterns and trends, especially those that may reveal rater bias and/or the over-identification of low protective factors and high behavior concerns amongst particular historically marginalized identity groups?
8. How will administrators, staff and families celebrate the successes associated with reducing risk factors and building protective factors in children?