

Least Restrictive Environment

Special Education is not a place. It is not a room at the end of the hallway, where students with disabilities are educated separately from their peers. It is a service or services provided in a variety of ways and settings, based on a student's individual needs.

One of the components of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Special Education law, is the expectation that student with IEP's should be educated alongside their non-disabled peers (in the General Education classroom) as much as it is appropriate, which is referred to as the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for that student.

The IDEA requires that "...to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled." Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) means that:

- Any placement outside the general education classroom must be justified by the child's individual disability-related needs
- Students must have meaningful access to same age peers without disabilities, when appropriate.
- Schools must consider providing any needed services in the general education classroom and other integrated settings

LRE is not always the general education classroom. It is individual to each student. Most students are able to be educated in the general education setting or may need the smaller setting of a resource type classroom for a few of their services. A student should not be removed from the general education environment only because of needed modifications to the general education curriculum. Many schools also have options for classes that are "co-taught" by both a General Education and a Special Education teacher.

The IEP team should consider any additional supports that might be suitable first, before moving a student to a more restrictive setting. It is always up to the IEP team,

which parents are a part of, to determine what supports should be provided when and where.

It is the responsibility of the IEP team to determine what needs the student has, what services will be put in place to meet those needs, and then finally where those services will be provided. The setting where services will be provided is referred to as the student's "placement", and the IDEA law requires a full range of placement options to be available to meet a student needs.

Involvement in music, art, physical education, school trips, clubs, extracurricular and other activities must be accommodated. Funding is never an appropriate reason for a more restrictive placement

Some students will spend most or all of their day in a Special Education classroom due to their needs while others may require an even more specialized setting, like a special behavioral program. If the student is unable to be successful in a typical classroom environment and requires a more specialized setting, it is up to the IEP team to find, arrange, and pay for that placement and any required transportation. Students with disabilities could also receive services, when needed, in a home, hospital, jail or institutional setting.

Related Resources

View the information sheet, "Considering LRE in Placement Decisions" from www.parentcenterhub.org.

ASK Essential Questions

- Can the student's needs be met in the general education environment?
- What does the student need to be successful in the general education environment?
- What supports does my child need to successfully participate in field trips and extracurricular activities?



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