

The Least Restrictive Environment



What IDEA Says About LRE

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004 (IDEA) state 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 non-disabled..."

The Act also states that, "special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs **only** if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of

supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

What does this mean for my child?

The least restrictive environment means that placement discussions for your child begin with consideration of the regular education classroom.

A student with disabilities should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers. He or she should have access to the general education curriculum, extracurricular activities and any program that is available to non-disabled students. Curriculum modifications, with the assistance of supplementary aids and services, provide the student access to the general education curriculum.

Supplementary Aids and Services

Comprehensive planning by the IEP Team is the key to determining the least restrictive environment (LRE). The IEP team must assess whether students with disabilities can participate and progress in the general education curriculum.

Specialized instructional strategies and accommodations must be part of the IEP, so that a student with a

disability can have **an equal opportunity to participate in the general education program.** Parents, as part of the IEP team, can help decide which supplementary aids and services are necessary for their child's educational success.

Supplementary Aids and Services Should Be:

1. Available to all students who need them
2. Designed to provide educational benefit
3. Provided in a manner that avoids stigmatizing students

(Gaskin Settlement Agreement, 2005)

PEN

Parent Education Network

2107 Industrial Highway
York, PA 17402

800.522.5827 V/TTY
800.441.5028 (Spanish)

www.parentednet.org

Prepared by
Lyn Caruso Spaar

"Respecting the Rights of Parents to Make Educational Decisions for Their Children"

The LRE presumption is that IEP teams BEGIN placement discussions for your child with the consideration of the REGULAR education classroom.

Discussions should focus on the supplementary aids and services needed to help your child benefit from educational services.

Designing Educational Programs That Support Student Needs

The IEP team's responsibility is to develop a plan that will support the success of your child's educational program. To accomplish this goal, the Team should focus on the student's:

- **Individual needs**—strengths and weaknesses
- **Curriculum demands**
- **Instructional settings**—can be multiple settings

The team's efforts should produce an "individual" program, and not a plan that attempts to **FIT** the student into current programs. The use of aids and services will be an important part of accomplishing this task.

One framework for considering the full range of supplementary aids and services (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999) includes four categories that can help you evaluate your child's general education environment:

1. **Physical**- consider the classroom, tables, and student's position in the room
2. **Instructional**- visual aids, reading guides, oral tests, electronic aids, and shorter tests
3. **Social/Behavioral**- social skill instruction, counseling, behavior management plan, peer or group support
4. **Collaborative**- study skill training, paraprofessional aide assistance, or instructional specialist support

How Can Parents Support LRE Placement?

Parents can assist in their child's placement in the least restrictive environment **through an active role on the IEP Team**. As an IEP team participant, parents help develop, review and revise their child's IEP. Parents can provide information about their child's abilities, interests, performance, and education history.

Preparation for the IEP meeting is always very important. Gathering the following information with the IEP team can help establish the correct LRE placement for your child:

- Determine your child's areas of difficulty
- Determine your child's areas of educational success
- Discuss with the team supplementary aids, services, and modifications that are necessary for your child
- Establish who will provide the



necessary supplementary service, and how often the service will occur

- Determine where the service will be provided
- Develop opportunities within the IEP for your child to interact with non-disabled peers (Non-academic and extracurricular activities might include meals, recess, transportation, recreational activities, athletics, field trips and clubs.)
- Determine and be specific about how much time with non-disabled peers is necessary to meet IEP goals
- Educate yourself about the LRE process and work with the IEP team to follow these steps

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