

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE)

Summarizing Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

The least restrictive environment, or LRE as it is more commonly called, is one of several vital components in the development of a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and plays a critical role, influencing

- where a child spends his or her time at school,
- how services are provided, and the relationships the child develops within the school and community

In basic terms, LRE refers to the setting where a child with a disability can receive an appropriate education designed to meet his or her educational needs, alongside peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. The LRE requirements in §300.114 through 300.117 express a strong preference, not a mandate, for educating children with disabilities in regular classes alongside their peers without disabilities. (71 Fed. Reg. 46585)

Each public agency must ensure 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 nondisabled**; and
- 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**. [§300.114(a)]

Considering the Meaning of “Regular Educational Environment”

The use of the term “regular educational environment” is longstanding in IDEA’s regulations. In response to a public comment on the scope of the LRE provision, the Department explained



that the term “encompasses regular classrooms and other settings in schools such as lunchrooms and playgrounds in which children without disabilities participate” (71 Fed. Reg. 46585).

Considering the Meaning of “Satisfactorily Educated”

There isn’t a specific standard or level established within IDEA for determining what it means for the education of a child with a disability to be “achieved satisfactorily.” Rather, each child’s IEP is the measuring tool. The IEP team determines if a child’s education is appropriate and if it is being achieved satisfactorily.

The IEP may be reviewed and revised, enabling the IEP team to respond to concerns that the child’s education in the regular educational environment “cannot be achieved satisfactorily” and to make necessary and appropriate adjustments or modifications, especially regarding the type of supplementary aids and services provided to support the child’s education in a regular classroom setting.

Considering “Supplementary Aids and Services”

Supplementary aids and services are often critical elements in supporting the education of children with disabilities in regular classes and their participation in a range of other school activities. IDEA’s definition of this term (at §300.42) reads:

Supplementary aids and services means aids, services, and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in

extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate”

Speaking practically, supplementary aids and services can be accommodations and modifications to the curriculum under study or the manner in which that content is presented or a child’s progress is measured. But that’s not all they are or can be. Supplementary aids and services can also include:

- direct services and supports to the child, and
- support and training for staff who work with that child.

That’s why determining what supplementary aids and services are appropriate for a particular child must be done on an individual basis.

What Other Settings Can Be Considered?

As already discussed, the frame within which placement determinations begin is the regular educational environment. If a child can be satisfactorily educated in that setting (with needed supplementary aids and services), then the general education class is that child’s LRE. Placing this child in a segregated class or separate program would directly violate the LRE provisions in IDEA.

However, the IEP team may determine that the child cannot be educated satisfactorily in the regular education classroom, even when supplementary aids and services are provided. An alternative placement must then be considered.

This is why schools have been, and still are, required to ensure that “a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services” [§300.115(a)]. These placement options include:

- instruction in regular classes
- special classes
- special schools
- home instruction
- instruction in hospitals and institutions

Who Decides Placement?

The group that determines the educational placement for a child with a disability must include individuals with specific expertise or knowledge:

- the child’s parents;
- personnel who know the variety of placement options available to meet the child’s needs, and
- individuals who understand the significance of the data used to develop the child’s IEP. [§300.116(a)]

Often, but not always, this may be the same group of people comprising the IEP team.

How Does the Group Decide Placement?

A child’s placement:

- is determined each and every year;
- is based on the child’s IEP;
- is as close as possible to the child’s home;
- places the child in the school he or she would normally attend if not disabled (unless the child’s IEP requires some other arrangement). [§300.116(a)-(c)]

If you need additional information regarding LRE, please call the Louisiana Parent Training & Information Center at 800-766-7736

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. (n.d.). Considering LRE in placement decisions. Retrieved from <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/placement/placement-lre>

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