



FACT SHEET

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Least Restrictive Environment: Questions & Answers

P.L. 108-446 (2004). Section. 612. (5) LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT.—(A) IN GENERAL.-- *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, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.*

This is the official language of the law and accompanying regulations. It certainly sounds as though schools are required to put all students with disabilities in the general education classroom first. Is the issue of placement that concrete?

Doesn't Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mean the general education classroom?

The federal law indicates that the IEP Team must first *consider* the characteristics of both the regular classroom including every type of supplemental service and the individual student, and how the individual student might experience success there. The law does not indicate that all students must first be put in the regular classroom if the IEP team determines that the student is unlikely to succeed there. Nor does the law indicate that the individual student must fail in the general classroom before trying other programming levels.

Remember: The IEP team includes educators, parents and evaluators. This group reviews all the assessment, medical, academic, and parent supplied documentation, and writes an appropriate IEP for the student *prior* to any discussion of placement options. No placement decisions are made until the IEP indicates instruction needs and goals.

Federal regulations require each school district to offer a range of placement options for disabled students. Those options range from placement in a regular classroom to hospital or institutional placements. Supplementary equipment and services, including therapy, should be considered by the IEP to support the student's learning success. Often a combination of placements work best for students.

A practical definition: A simple way to think about LRE is “the programming and services and placement where the student is most successful”. Most students are served in a mix of programming levels, including regular classroom time.

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