



LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

WHAT IS LRE?

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) refers to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) federal requirement that *“children with disabilities not be placed in special classes or separate schools unless the nature and severity of their disability is such that education in regular classes with supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”* This means that your child should be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, including in after school and extracurricular activities. This requirement applies to ALL public schools. While the word “inclusion” is not mentioned in IDEA, it’s an important concept that is based on LRE and the belief that everyone benefits when students with disabilities and other students learn together.

WHO DETERMINES LRE?

LRE is an important and required component that all IEP Teams must determine when developing a student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). IEP teams make many decisions that affect where each child will learn and participate during the school day, along with how they receive their special education services. IEP team members, which includes parents, must base these decisions on available data and the Least Restrictive Environment requirement. The team will determine each child’s LRE based on their strengths and unique needs, IEP goals, and services needed to reach those goals. IEP goals must be both ambitious and realistic for each student.

IEP teams may decide that a child can learn in a general educational setting for all or part of each school day, based on the child’s individual needs and the services they receive. They can consider both the academic and social benefit of spending time with children without disabilities. The IEP team’s decision regarding LRE should be reviewed at a minimum once a year during the annual review.

The IEP team may consider more restrictive environments **only after** weighing the above factors and rejecting a less restrictive environment. Each IEP must include a Least Restrictive Environment Justification statement. If a student will be removed from nondisabled peers for any part of the day, the IEP Team must explain why the services cannot be delivered with nondisabled peers with the use of supplemental aids and services.

As mentioned, students with disabilities must be educated alongside their non disabled peers to the fullest extent appropriate. An educational setting is appropriate when a student can achieve both their IEP goals and grasp grade level academic standards with the support of special education instruction and related services (such as OT, PT, Speech, etc.) outlined in their IEP.

IEP teams have the flexibility to make accommodations that provide the student with the opportunity to learn and thrive in a more inclusive learning environment. This can include modifications to the environment, instructional methods, materials, assignments, testing procedures, and more.





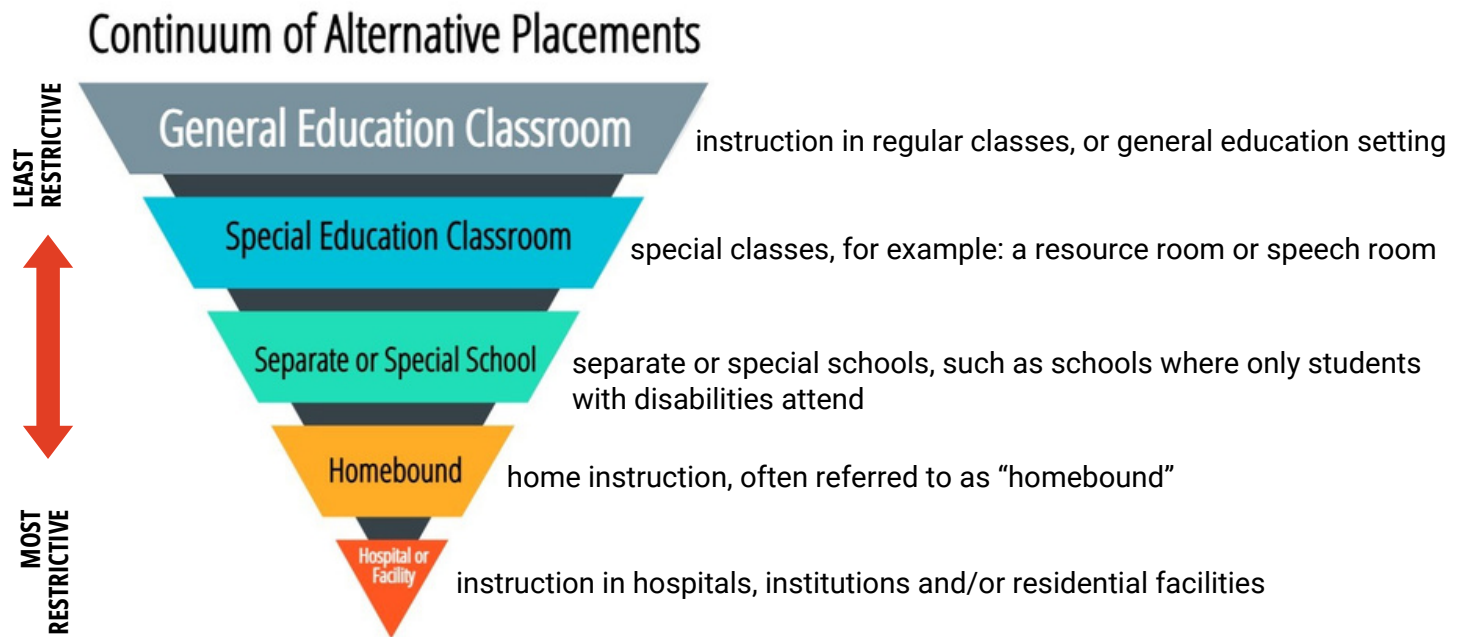
HOW IS LRE DETERMINED?

PLACEMENT

IEP teams may **not** make placement decisions solely on factors that include diagnosis or disability category, severity of the disability, specific scores on evaluations, space or staffing issues, or administrative convenience.

Additionally, IEPs can offer direct services and assistance tailored to the child's unique needs, as well as training and support for parents as well as staff members who interact with the student.

If the IEP team determines that a child cannot be educated satisfactorily in the regular education classroom, even when supplementary aids and services are provided, they must consider an alternative placement. Public schools units 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. The continuum must include instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. In addition, the continuum includes making provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement. For preschool children, the continuum includes a regular early childhood program, special education program provided in a separate class, separate school, residential facility, a service provider location or home instruction.



It's important to note that each public school unit as a whole must offer of a continuum of alternative placement options, however this does not apply to each school building. The IDEA states that "unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that they would attend if nondisabled." If the child cannot be taught in the school they would attend if nondisabled, the child is educated as close to the child's home as possible. In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that they need. A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.