



Special Information for All Educators Least Restrictive Educational Environment (LRE)

Background Information

Making available a free appropriate public education to children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is an original tenet of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled. In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs. A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.

To this end, IDEA emphasizes that special education is a service and not a place, and as such, supports and services should be delivered to the child in the least restrictive environment. All children learn best in environments that respect and honor their unique learning abilities and needs.

Although IDEA provides that children with disabilities are to be educated with their nondisabled peers, to the maximum extent appropriate, the nature or the severity of the disability of a child may be such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved. In such cases, IDEA provides that schools make available a continuum of alternative placements to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services, including: instruction in regular classes; special classes; special schools; home instruction; and instruction in hospitals and institutions. The placement of a child in the LRE must be as close as possible to the child's home.

The requirement for a continuum of alternative placements reinforces the importance of an individualized determination of the needs of a student by the individualized education program (IEP) team in determining a least restrictive educational placement for each student.

Connections to the Law

An understanding of educational environments begins with thorough knowledge of the IDEA provisions. The entire statute and regulations are available electronically. You are encouraged to use the **Discover IDEA CD 2002** or the ASPIIRE/ILIAD web site at www.ideapractices.org to navigate your search of relevant sections on educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environments, such as those pertaining to the following LRE requirements:

- **What are related services?**
34 C.F.R. §300.24 – Related services
- **What is special education?**
34 C.F.R. §300.26 – Special education
- **What are supplementary aids and services?**
34 C.F.R. §300.28 – Supplementary aids and services
- **What is the State's responsibility for ensuring that children with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment?**
34 C.F.R. §300.130 – Least restrictive environment
- **What is the public agency's responsibility for ensuring parent involvement in placement decisions?**
34 C.F.R. §300.501 – Opportunity to examine records; parent participation in meetings
- **What are the basic LRE requirements?**

34 C.F.R. §300.550 – General LRE requirements

- **What is a continuum of alternative placements?**

34 C.F.R. §300.551 – Continuum of alternative placements

- **How are placement decisions made?**

34 C.F.R. §300.552 – Placements

- **Does LRE apply to nonacademic settings?**

34 C.F.R. §300.553 – Nonacademic settings

- **What are LRE requirements for children in public or private institutions?**

34 C.F.R. §300.554 – Children in public or private institutions

- **Does the State have any responsibility for ensuring that school personnel have the necessary skills and knowledge to implement LRE requirements?**

34 C.F.R. §300.555 – Technical assistance and training activities

- **How is LRE monitored?**

34 C.F.R. §300.556 – Monitoring activities

Relevant Materials

The purpose of this section is to connect users to relevant materials on educational environments, some of which have been reviewed by OSEP for consistency with IDEA. For a listing of OSEP-reviewed materials, visit the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) at www.nichcy.org.

Annotated Materials

- *Related Services* – National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY).
- *School Accommodations and Modifications* – Families and Advocates Partnership for Education Project (FAPE).
- *Twenty-third Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* – U.S. Department of Education.
- *Questions Often Asked by Parents About Special Education Services* – NICHCY.

Other Resources That Address Educational Environments

There are other resources related to least restrictive educational environments that may

provide additional sources of information. [Note: Information on obtaining many of these resources is found on the ASPIRE/ILIAD web site at www.ideapractices.org.]

- *Developing Educationally Relevant IEPs: A Technical Assistance Document for Speech-Language Pathologists*
- *The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom: Working as a Team*
- *Understanding the Special Education Process: An Overview for Parents*
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): A Workshop for Families, Advocates, and Self-advocates*
- *Let's Team Up! A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals*
- *Discover IDEA CD 2002*
- *Questions and Answers About IDEA*
- *Strengthening and Supporting Teacher/Provider-Paraeducator Teams: Guidelines for Paraeducator Roles, Supervision, and Preparation*
- *IDEA Requirements for Preschoolers with Disabilities: IDEA Early Childhood Policy and Practice Guide*

Web-Based Resources

Discover IDEA Documents

- www.ideapractices.org
- www.fape.org
- www.ideapolicy.org
- www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/
- www.nichcy.org

American Occupational Therapy Association

- www.aota.org

American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA)

- www.asha.org

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

- www.nasponline.org

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services (NRCPE)

- www.nrcpara.org

Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (USELC)

- www.edc.org/collaborative