



LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE) UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA)

What is LRE?

IDEA calls for children with disabilities to be educated with children who are non-disabled to the maximum extent appropriate. This means children who receive special education services should spend as much time as possible with same age peers who do not receive special education services. “Appropriate” is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, and allows for the individualized education program (IEP) team to determine which environment will be the most effective for each student. Education of your child in a general education classroom is the first placement choice the IEP team should make and removing your child from a general education classroom, even for a short period of time, should only occur “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.”

What is the appropriate LRE for my child?

Every child is different. IDEA requires IEP teams to determine the best environment to educate a child on a case-by-case basis and it further requires school districts to develop a “continuum of alternative placements” to meet the needs of children with disabilities. While school districts differ in the types of environments they offer for the education of children with disabilities, school districts must offer instruction in:

- **Regular class** – Children with special needs can receive instruction in a general education classroom with students without disabilities.
- **Special classes** – Based upon the unique needs of your child, the provision of special education/related services may best be accomplished outside of the general education setting. This is often referred to as “pull out” or “direct instruction outside of the general education setting.” Many “center-based programs” are also special classes for the provision of special education services.
- **Special schools** – Day treatment programs and schools specifically designed for students with disabilities may offer needed services for your child.
- **The student’s home** – If your child is unable to attend school due to her/his unique needs or your child’s disability is such that instruction in a school setting is not feasible, your child may receive homebound services. The mere fact that a student is averse to school attendance or the fact that the District cannot find an appropriate placement for your child does not necessarily mean your child should receive homebound services. Because your child will be removed from the school setting and will have no interaction with peers, a homebound placement is very restrictive and the IEP should carefully consider whether this placement meets your child’s unique needs.
- **Hospitals/Institutions** – Some children need intense hospital or residential treatment options to meet their unique needs. If your students present levels of performance

(PLOP) indicate intense treatment is needed, a hospital/institution may be the most appropriate placement.

While it is true that the general education classroom is an environment the IEP team must consider when determining LRE for your child, it does not mean that a general education classroom is the best environment to meet your child's unique needs. Some children need higher levels of support that the general education classroom cannot offer and the team may need to consider a separate classroom, special school, homebound services, or residential treatment facilities to meet a child's unique needs. Parent(s)/guardian(s) are members of the IEP team and have a voice in the discussion regarding placement.

What are “supplementary aids and services?”

There are many forms of assistance available to your child to successfully receive some instruction in a general education classroom. Technically speaking, supplemental aids and services are “aids, services, and other supports that are provided. . .to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate. . .” Supplementary aids and services could include specialized equipment (for example a cube chair, a keyboard or tablet), pacing of instruction, levels of staff support such as paraprofessional support, planning time for collaboration needed by the staff.

Is my school district required to educate my child at our neighborhood home school or the school closest to my home?

It depends. School districts must ensure that all special education and related services identified in your child's IEP are provided for by the school your child attends. In selecting the least restrictive environment for your child, the placement must be as close as possible to your child's home and must occur in the school that your child would attend if he/she was not disabled (unless your child's IEP requires some other arrangement). Indeed, your child should not be removed from the general education classroom simply because she/he needs a modified curriculum. Furthermore, in making a decision regarding LRE for your child, the team must consider any potential harmful effects on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs.” In Colorado, where there are several locations that can meet your child's needs, the director of special education shall make the final decision. All of the LRE considerations discussed in this FAQ sheet must be evaluated in making a location decision and your voice is an important voice in making location decisions.

Is my child entitled to participate in all extra-curricular activities offered?

Yes! Your child is entitled to participate in meals, recess, and extracurricular activities with non-disabled peers. Extracurricular activities are events that are sponsored by the school, but take place outside of the school day such as athletics, school clubs, etc. Additionally, the District must ensure that your child receives the necessary supplementary aids and services to participate in those activities.