

Placement in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Understanding and Making the Placement Decision

What is Placement?

It is not the physical location of the special education services. Rather, it is the set of services and the type of environment, or the spot on the continuum of services, in which those services are delivered.

Who Makes the Placement Decision?

The student's IEP team is the group who makes the decision. This requires an individualized inquiry into the student's unique educational and related services needs.

When is the Placement Decision Made?

It is the last of a series of decisions made at the IEP meeting. It is made after goals, objectives/benchmarks, and instructional modifications are developed. The decision is based on those IEP elements.

What is the LRE Mandate in the IDEA with Respect to Making Placement Decisions?

- To the maximum extent possible, students with exceptionalities must be educated in the regular classroom.
- Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal from the regular classroom occurs only when the nature or the severity of the educational exceptionality is such that education in the regular class cannot be satisfactorily achieved with appropriate aids and supports.
- Unless the student's IEP requires some other kind of arrangement, the student attends the same school he or she would attend if not eligible for special education services.
- Students with exceptionalities must be afforded the opportunity to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities along with their peers in regular education.
- Less restrictive placements must always be considered. However, where there is a reasonable likelihood that a student with an exceptionality can be educated in the regular classroom with the use of supplementary aids and supports, then that placement should be tried.

The Continuum of Alternative Placements

The continuum is a spectrum of placements where an IEP can be implemented. It ranges from less restrictive (from all regular education with monitoring services) to more restrictive (homebound), as well as placements between those two points as shown in the example below.

Example of a Continuum of Alternative Placements

Least Restrictive

- Regular education with weekly monitoring from a special education provider
- Regular education with daily consultation from a special education provider

- Regular education with special education services and supports included in that setting which are aligned with the general curriculum (utilizing such strategies as flexible groupings, universally-designed curriculum, overlapping curriculum, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, parallel or alternative instruction, team teaching)
- Regular education with special education services provided for part of the day in a resource room or a special education classroom
- Self-contained special education classroom
- Special day school (outside the school environment)
- Residential treatment facility
- Hospital
- Detention facility
- Homebound

Most Restrictive

State and federal regulations require that public agencies make the continuum of alternative placements available as needed in order to meet the needs of the individual student with an exceptionality.

The Decision

When making the placement decision as an individualized inquiry, the IEP team should follow these steps.

1. First, determine through the IEP process the student’s educational needs. Determine what constitutes an appropriate program for the student, not where it will be provided or what pre-existing “program” fits best.
2. Next, review the continuum of placement options on page 2 in sequence from least restrictive to most restrictive. Look at how each option currently exists, as well as how it might also be modified.
3. Now start the decision-making process by examining regular classroom placement as the first option. Have a serious and thoughtful discussion about the three factors below.
 - a. Consider whether the student can be educated satisfactorily in the regular classroom with one or more of the following:
 - i. supplementary aids and supports
 - ii. program and/or curriculum modifications
 - iii. provision of an itinerant special education provider
 - iv. assistance from a paraeducator
 - v. special education training for the regular education teacher □ the use of assistive technology
 - vi. the development and implementation of FBAs and BIPs
 - vii. designed to identify and meet the daily behavioral challenges presented by the student in the regular education classroom
 - b. Compare the benefits provided in the regular education classroom and those provided in a special education classroom or segregated setting.
 - i. Compare social and communication skills, as well as academic benefits.
 - ii. Compare the relative benefits to the student.

- iii. Keep in mind that regular education classroom placement is not dependent on the student's ability to learn the same things in the same way.
 - c. Consider the potentially beneficial or harmful effects that a regular class placement may have on the student with an exceptionality or the other students in the class.
 - i. Positive benefits might include social interaction with non-exceptional peers, peer modeling, high expectations, and acceptance of others.
 - ii. Harmful effects might include unduly disruptive behavior that impairs the student's learning or that of others even with the implementation of a BIP.
4. Consider each of the three factors above equally.
5. Keep in mind the placement decision cannot be solely based on:
 - a. Category of the exceptionality
 - b. Severity of the exceptionality
 - c. Language and communication needs
 - d. Needed modifications in the curriculum
 - e. Configuration of the public agency's delivery system
 - f. Availability of space or educational and related services
 - g. Administrative convenience
6. Keep in mind that where there is a reasonable likelihood that a student with exceptionalities can be educated in the regular classroom with supplementary aids and supports, then that placement should be tried for as much as the school day as possible.
7. If the team agrees that the student should receive part or all of the special education services outside of the regular classroom, then the IEP must also provide opportunities for participation in regular education programs in academic, nonacademic, or extracurricular activities, as appropriate.
8. If the team agrees that the student's IEP cannot be satisfactorily implemented in the regular education classroom with the provision of supplementary services and supports, then the team can consider a more restrictive placement keeping in mind that the regular education classroom is not the LRE for that student at that time. That is, having the understanding that the ultimate plan and goal is to work towards a more fully inclusive placement when possible.
9. Finally, clearly articulate on the IEP document the placement decision and the justification for it based on the considerations in this booklet.