

The Least Restrictive Environment

Most children with disabilities benefit greatly from regular contact with their peers who do not have disabilities. They also benefit from knowing that they are more like those peers than they are different. The children without disabilities also benefit equally, and they all gain a truer understanding of the world around them by learning together. There is no doubt though, that many children with disabilities need strong supports as they participate in regular classes in their neighborhood schools but this has to be determined on an individual basis. Thus the law calls for an appropriate individualized educational program (IEP)*

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA '97) requires that children be educated in the 'least restrictive environment'.

Section 300.550(b) Each public agency shall ensure -

- (a) That 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 nondisabled; and
- (b) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Section 300.551 Continuum of alternative placements.

- (a) Each public agency shall ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.
- (b) Make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement.

Section 300.552 Placements.

In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, each public agency shall ensure that -

- (a) The placement decision -
 - 1. is made by a group of persons, including the parents, and other persons knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data, and placement options; and
 - 2. is made in conformity with the LRE provisions above.
- (b) The child's placement -
 - 1. is determined at least annually;
 - 2. is based on the child's IEP; and
 - 3. is as close as possible to the child's home.
- (c) Unless the IEP requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if non-disabled.
- (d) In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services he or she needs; and
- (e) A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.

Taken from: *"Purposeful Integration-Inherently Equal"* D. Biklen, S. Lehr, S. Searl & S. Taylor, Syracuse Univ.'87
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