Chapter 7: Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

In this chapter you will:

· discover what an educational placement is and learn what some of the options look like

· find out what research says about inclusive education

· learn the definition of general education environment

Where should students be educated?

The decision about where the student should receive services is called educational placement. The IEP team, which includes parents, decides the educational placement and services for the student. This is called "placement." Decisions are made at least once a year at the IEP meeting and are based on the student's individual needs. The IDEA presumes that the first placement option considered for each child with a disability is the general education classroom in the school that the child would attend if he/she did not have a disability. The team must also consider what extra supports the student needs that will allow the child to be successful in his or her educational placement.

Examples of services that could be provided to support students are: assistive technology, positive behavior strategies, modified assignments, a paraprofessional, study breaks, or preferential seating. There are many kinds of services and supports that could be included in the IEP.

If the IEP team decides that a general education class on a full-time basis is not the most appropriate setting for the student, then they can consider other options like resource rooms, special classes, special schools, or home/hospital instruction. Free appropriate public education (FAPE) includes three general areas: general education, nonacademic activities and extracurricular activities. To exclude your child from any of these three without following procedural safeguards would be a denial of FAPE.

- The IEP must include an explanation when the student is educated or separated from students who do not have disabilities for any school sponsored activity.

- The school must provide the student equal access to nonacademic and extracurricular services. Students with disabilities must have an equal opportunity to participate in all activities sponsored by the school (transportation, clubs, music, athletics, and other activities).

- The student should be placed in the school he/she

would attend if not disabled or in an age-appropriate setting as close as possible to the student's home unless the child's needs, as determined by the IEP team, require placement elsewhere.

What do some placement options look like?

Education placement decisions are made based on student's needs and **may** include the following locations (*this is not an exhaustive list*):

General education

The student receives specially designed instruction with supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom. This could include, but not be limited to, modifications to the regular curriculum, co-teaching (general education teacher and special education teacher team teaching in the same classroom), special education training for the general education teacher, computer assisted devices, note takers, physical arrangements of the classroom, peer supports, related services provided in the general education setting, grading modifications, and/or classroom or individual aides.

> **Important Reminder**
>
> A student with a disability should not be removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.

Resource Room (Special Class)

The student receives specially designed instruction through a special education class for less than half of the school day. The student is included, to the maximum extent appropriate, in general education classes.

Self-Contained Room (Special Class)

The student receives specially designed instruction through a special education class for the majority of the school day. The student is included, with support (using some of the above methods) in those parts of general education classes when appropriate.

Separate Day School (Special School)

The student receives specially designed instruction in a special school. The student is included in those parts of general education classes that are appropriate.

Residential Program (Special School)

The student receives specially designed instruction in a special school and lives on the grounds of the residential program.

Home/Hospital Program

The student, with extraordinary needs that cannot be met by public schools, receives specially designed instruction at home or in the hospital.

Schools may not make placement decisions based solely on factors such as the following:
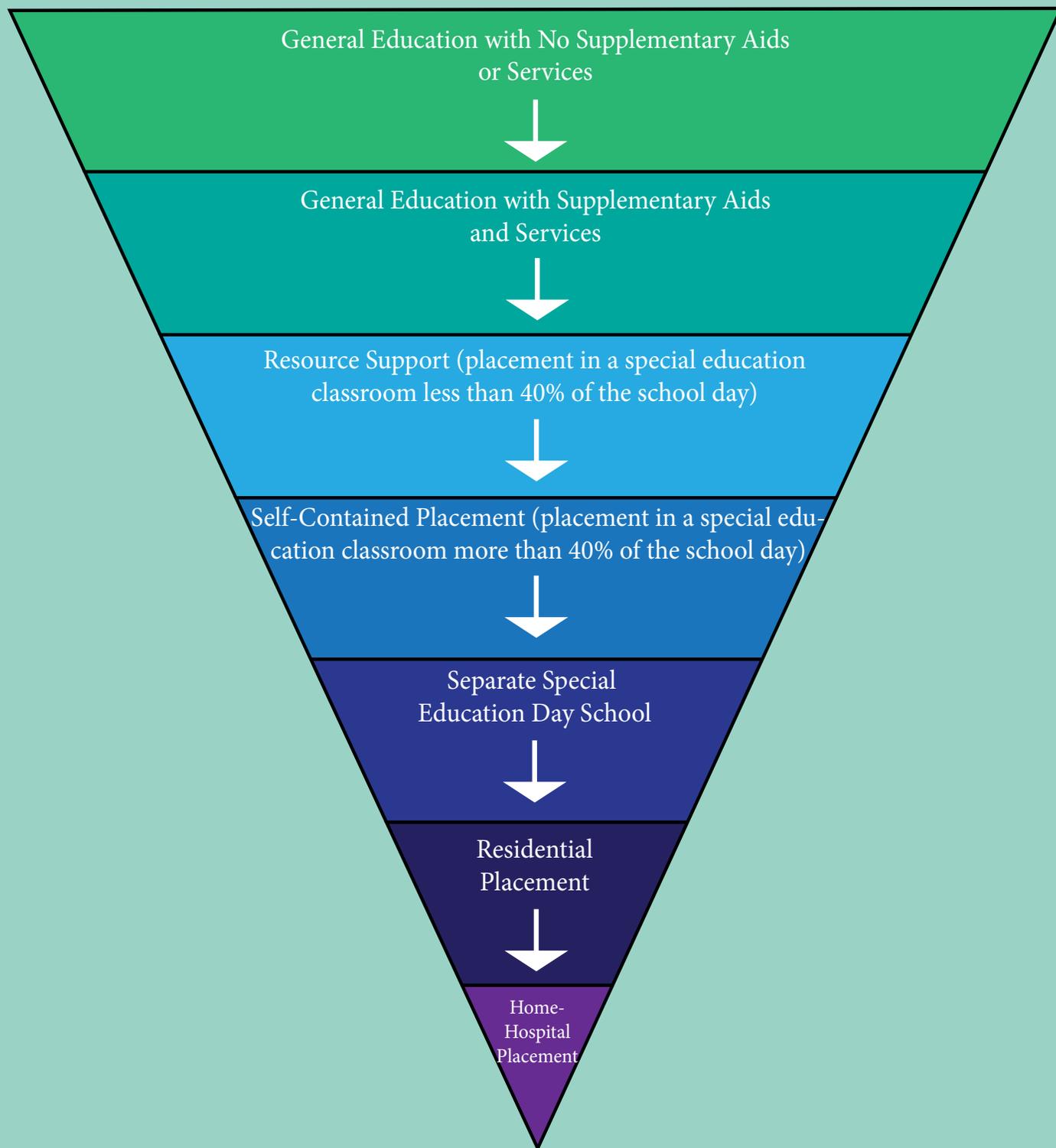
» Category of disability;

» Severity of disability;

» Configuration of delivery system;

» Availability of educational or related services;

» Availability of space; or

» Administrative convenience.

Funding concerns cannot be used as a reason for not providing appropriate programs or services. If funding is a problem, your local school district must explore other ways of serving your student.

The Placement Continuum

General Education with No Supplementary Aids or Services

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General Education with Supplementary Aids and Services

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Resource Support (placement in a special education classroom less than 40% of the school day)

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Self-Contained Placement (placement in a special education classroom more than 40% of the school day)

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Separate Special Education Day School

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Residential Placement

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Home-Hospital Placement

> ## The Big Picture: LRE, IEPs & Placement
>
> * *IEP GOALS SHOULD BE WRITTEN BEFORE MAKING A DECISION ON PLACE-MENT.*
>
> * *GOALS SHOULD BE WRITTEN TO SUPPORT THE STUDENT'S NEEDS. THEY SHOULD NOT BE WRITTEN TO REFLECT THE SERVICES AVAILABLE IN A SPE-CIFIC PLACEMENT*

Supplementary aids and services can include changes in:

- instructional strategies
- social or behavioral support
- environment
- assessment (testing)
- staff support

Instructional strategies can include:

- teaching to a student's learning style
- differentiating instruction (teaching to meet the needs of all children in the classroom)
- providing hands-on activities
- using technology to support teaching and learning
- providing one-to-one instruction

Environmental supports can include:

- assigning special seating
- providing space for movement or breaks
- helping student maintain an uncluttered space
- providing study carrels

Behavioral supports can include:

- implementing a positive behavioral intervention plan
- facilitating friendships
- providing rest breaks
- conducting a functional behavioral analysis
- providing counseling or social skills training
- modifying behavioral expectations for the student so he/she is not punished for behaviors caused by the disability
- modifying the environment to reduce stimuli that are known to trigger the student's behavioral problems, such as excess noise or crowded hallways

Staff supports can include:

- training
- collaboration time between general education and special education teachers
- co-taught classrooms
- use of paraprofessional staff
- assistance to the teacher with curriculum and test modifications

Assessment (testing) accommodations can include:

- reading the test to the student
- additional time
- fewer questions
- allowing the student to give answers orally
- highlighting key directions

What does the research say about inclusive education?

> *"Placement in inclusive programs led to academic gains for students with disabilities, including improved performance on standardized tests, mastery of IEP goals, grades, on-task behavior and motivation to learn."*
>
> **National Center for Education Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995**

> "Students with cognitive disabilities educated in inclusive classes test higher on literacy measures than students educated in separate special education classes."
>
> **Buckley, Bird, Sacks & Archer, 2000**

> "Placement in inclusive classrooms does not interfere with the academic performance of students without disabilities with respect to the amount of allocated time and engaged instructional time, the rate of interruption to planned activities and students' achievement on test scores and report card grades."
>
> **York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff & Caughey, 1992**

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recognized the following benefits when children with disabilities are part of the life and activities of a school:

- Typical peers serve as models for children with disabilities.

- Natural friendships develop within the child's home community.

- Children with disabilities learn new academic and social skills within natural environments, facilitating generalization of skills.

- All students learn to value diversity.

- General education classrooms are better able to meet the needs of all students as a result of additional instructional resources, staff development for general and special educators, a more flexible curriculum, and adapted instructional delivery systems.

There are other benefits, too, including:

- Students without disabilities develop an appreciation and acceptance of individual differences, including their own.

- Students are better prepared for adult life in an inclusive society.

- Students without disabilities have opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others.

- Students also have the opportunity to participate in alternative learning experiences, such as peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups, specific strategies instruction, individual remediation, small group instruction, specific language/listening developmental activities, and differentiated instruction.

- There is increased collaboration among school staff and increased parent participation.

- A wider variety of interventions and modifications are attempted with students.

- Teaching methods, techniques, and strategies are enhanced.

- Expectations are higher for children with disabilities—and so is their achievement.

What is the General Education Environment?

The United States Department of Education explained that the term encompasses regular classrooms and other settings in schools such as lunchrooms and playgrounds in which children without disabilities participate.

> ### Worth a Look
>
> The Federal requirements for Least Restrictive Environment may be found at 34 CFR 300.320.

Placement is not an either/or decision, where children are either placed in a general education classroom or they're not. The intent is for services to follow, or go with, the child, not for the child to follow services.