

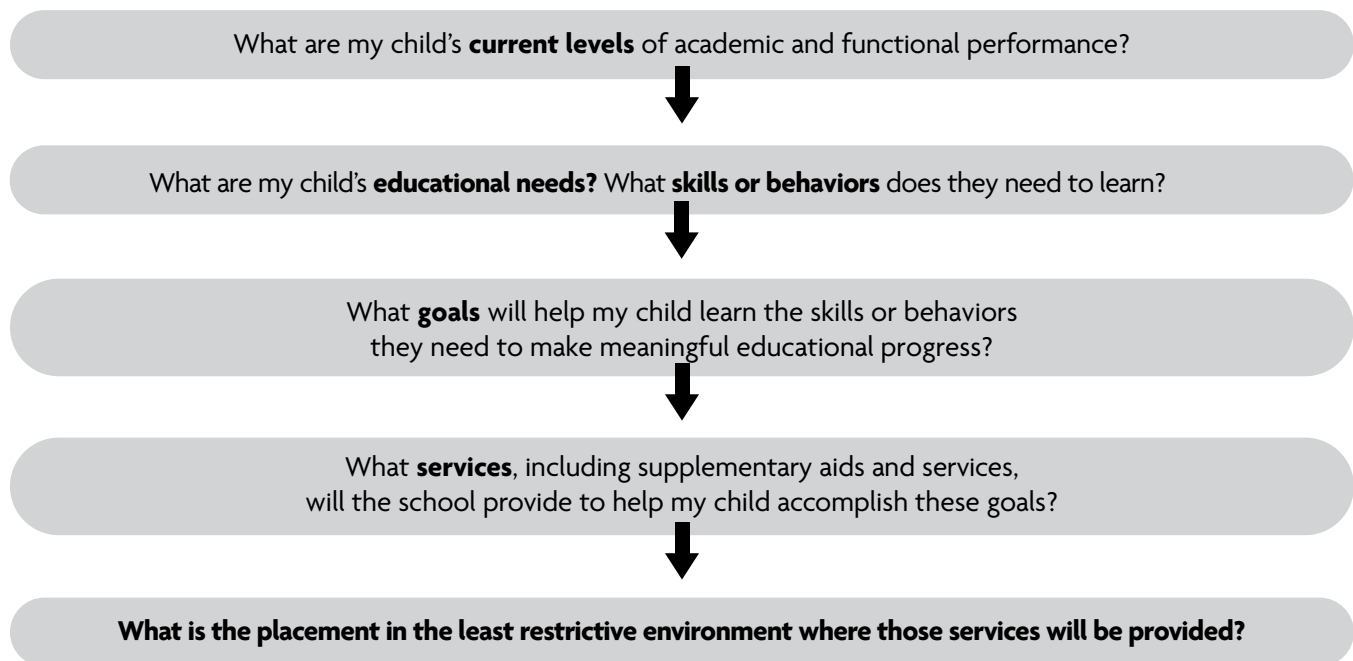


Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):

What parents need to know

The requirement to ensure that children with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is an important one. Minnesota has set grade-level academic standards for all students in areas such as English language arts (which includes reading), math, science, social studies, the arts, and physical education. School districts chose general education curricula that will help students meet the grade-level standards. While the curriculum can be taught in a variety of special education settings, the more a student with disabilities is appropriately involved in the general education classroom using the general education curriculum, the more likely the student will be prepared to meet the standards.

How does LRE fit into the development of your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP)? Each year the IEP team, which includes the parents, will ask questions such as the following:



The regular education classroom is the first placement choice the IEP team must consider. The team must ask what extra supports or “**supplementary aids and services**,” if any, may allow your child to be placed in a regular education classroom environment. This means that specific services and supports are given so that your child can, as much as is appropriate:

- Advance toward accomplishing annual goals
- Learn and participate with other children with and without disabilities
- Participate and make progress in the general education curriculum
- Participate in extracurricular or nonacademic activities

Parents may want to ask the question, “What can be provided in the regular education classroom so that my child is not taken out of that setting?” The supplementary aids and services section of the IEP includes accommodations, assistive technology, and support for school personnel. Supports for school personnel may be necessary so your child can fully participate in school. For example, a consultant might provide suggestions to the regular education teacher for including your child fully in the classroom or train staff to use an assistive technology device.

If, after this discussion, the IEP team determines that your child with disabilities will have education or other school activities that include only other children with disabilities for some or all of the school day, the school must provide an explanation in the IEP. **The IEP must explain why and how much time your child will be educated or participate in activities outside of the regular education setting.** The explanation will include why the nature and severity of your child’s disability is such that he or she must be removed from general education to receive services or participate in an activity. The school must describe what the student will miss by not attending the regular education classroom.

Parents must be informed about the available placement alternatives. The IEP team will discuss these alternatives and together you will decide what is most appropriate to meet your child’s needs in the least restrictive environment. The services must be developed to fit your child. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school districts to have a variety of placement settings, called federal settings, available to meet the individual needs of children with disabilities. The IEP team must also consider whether the proposed placement will have any possible harmful effects on your child or on the quality of the services your child receives.

Parents must be invited to participate in all educational placement decisions. If you are not able to attend a meeting when a placement decision is made, the school must use other methods, such as individual or conference telephone calls or video conferencing, to help you participate. The school must keep a record of how staff tried to help you be involved in making the decision.

Children with disabilities must have an **equal opportunity to participate in all activities** sponsored by the school: education, counseling services, athletics, transportation, special interest groups and clubs, music, and other services and activities.

TAKEAWAYS:

- The LRE for a child with disabilities is an educational placement that provides the appropriate program, including any necessary supports, in as typical a classroom environment as is appropriate for the individual child.
- When appropriate for the individual child with disabilities, the child should:
 - Attend the school and classroom they would typically go to if they did not have disabilities
 - Be provided appropriate supplementary aids and services in the regular education classroom
 - Have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities with children who do not have disabilities
- Parents must be invited to participate in all educational placement decisions.

In summary, your child’s school (the “public agency”) must make sure that your child with disabilities is educated with children without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate for your child. **Why is this so important?** According to federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, children with disabilities should be educated in the regular education classroom as much as is appropriate so they can “meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children and be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible.”¹

¹ Findings, IDEA 2004 Section 1400 (c)(5)(A)