

LRE & the Continuum of Special Education Services

Research consistently supports the positive link between access to core instruction in general education settings and improved outcomes for students with disabilities.¹ Inclusion is the belief and practice that all students have the right to meaningfully access academic and social opportunities in general education settings. The goal of the [Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network](#) is to increase the meaningful participation of Washington’s students, including students with disabilities, in general education settings.

Continuum

Increasing participation in general education for students with disabilities is a statewide priority, and school districts are required by state and federal law to ensure that a continuum of placements is available to meet the special education and related services needs of students with disabilities, from preschool through 12th grade ([WAC 392-172A-02055](#)). The continuum must include a range of supports and instruction within the general education environment, as well as access, when needed, to special education classes, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions. Consideration and priority must always start with providing instruction to the maximum extent appropriate with the general education environment.

Definitions²

- Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – The provision of special education services, including to preschool students and students in public or private institutions or other care facilities, must be provided in the general education environment with students who are nondisabled to the maximum extent appropriate for the student. Special classes, separate schools, or other removal of students eligible for special education from the general education environment should occur only if the nature or severity of the student’s disability is such that education in general education with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved.
- General Education Program – A program that includes 50 percent or more nondisabled children (i.e., children that do not have IEPs).
- Special Education Program – A program that includes less than 50 percent nondisabled children.
- Regular Early Childhood Program – An early childhood program that includes a majority (at least 50 percent) of nondisabled children. This may include, but is not limited to, Head Start or Early Childhood Educational Assistance Program (ECEAP) classrooms,

¹ Research studies including [Carlberg and Kavale](#) (1980); [Wang and Baker](#) (1985); [Oh-Young and Filler](#) (2015); and [Theobald, Goldhaber, and Gratz](#) (2018).

² The definition of LRE is found in [WAC 392-172A-02050 through -02070](#). The definitions of general education, special education, and regular early childhood programs are found in the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\), Part B Data Dictionary](#).



kindergarten, private kindergartens or preschools, group child development centers, or childcare, etc.

Determining LRE

When determining the educational placement of a student eligible for special education, the decision must be made annually by a group of persons, including the parent and other persons knowledgeable about the student, the evaluation data, and the placement options ([WAC 392-172A-02060](#)). The selection of the appropriate placement for each student must be based on:

- the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP),
- the LRE requirements,
- the probability of assisting the student in attaining their annual goals, and
- the consideration of any potential harmful effect on the student or the quality of services they need.

Students should not be removed from the general education classroom solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum, and the student should be educated in the school they would attend if the student did not have an IEP unless the student's IEP requires some other arrangement.

Resources

There are several resources to support building more inclusive learning environments on the OSPI Special Education website and [IPTN webpage](#):

- [LRE Self-Assessment](#) (adapted from West Ed)
- [The Universal Design for Learning \(UDL\) Guidelines](#) (from the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST))
- [High-Leverage Practices in Special Education](#) (from the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center)
- [National Early Childhood Inclusion Indicators Initiative](#) (from The Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center)
- [Preschool Inclusion Finance Toolkit](#) (from ECTA)
- [Early Childhood LRE Decision Tree](#) (adapted from ECTA)