

Placement



Placement should be based on the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in which your student can make effective progress in the general curriculum. The definition of LRE in **Massachusetts special education regulations 603 CMR 28.02 (12)** is: "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are [1] educated with children who are not disabled, and [2] special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily." This means that the first placement option considered for any student is the school and classroom that the student would attend if non-disabled—a "typical" classroom in their neighborhood school.

It is important to remember that special education is not a "place," but rather a set of services. Similarly, the LRE provision of the IDEA emphasizes services rather than the placement. Learning in less restrictive environments benefits students with and without disabilities in so much as all children are more likely to improve their academic performance, and increase their communication and socialization skills.

IDEA requires that a student with a disability be provided with "supplementary aids and services" as needed to enable him or her to succeed in the LRE. These supplementary aids and services can be provided in general education classes to enable children with disabilities to be educated with children without disabilities. These aids and services may include, but are not limited to modifications of lessons, assistance of a consultant teacher with special education training, computer-assisted devices, the use of note-takers, additional time for tests, preferential seating and/or resource rooms.

The law requires that each school district ensure that there is a "continuum of alternative placements" available to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Emphasis should be placed on the provision of services, and not the specific placements themselves. This continuum must include general education classes, special education classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals or institutions. Each child's specific needs must determine the appropriate placement within this continuum of alternative services. Factors which may be considered in determining placements include the educational benefits to the child with a disability, the non-academic and social benefits to the child and the degree of disruption that the child will cause in the classroom. Factors which may not be considered in determining placements include the disabled child's category of disability, the severity of the disability and the availability of placements, related services or funding. **"The school district shall not delay implementation of the IEP due to lack of classroom space or personnel, shall provide as many of the services on the accepted IEP as possible and shall immediately inform the parent in writing of any delayed services, reasons for delay, actions ...to address the lack of**

space or personnel and shall offer alternative methods...” Massachusetts Special Education Regulations *CMR 28.06(2)(d)2*

The benefits of learning in the LRE for children with special needs can be great: increased motivation, higher self-esteem, improved communication and socialization skills, and greater academic achievement. While some children with disabilities will require a special class, the LRE for most will be in a general education class with appropriate supports and services – an inclusion class. Children with disabilities in inclusion classrooms, particularly in their home school, tend to form friendships more readily and develop better social skills, especially if teachers promote interaction. Access to the general education curriculum, taught by teachers trained in that curriculum, gives the disabled child the chance to aim for the same goals as everyone else, and results in higher academic achievement than the lower expectations often applied in a self-contained special education class.

Inclusion in general education classes benefits not only children with disabilities but also children without disabilities. Rather than being disadvantaged by being in an inclusion classroom, children without disabilities who are educated alongside their disabled peers generally have a greater awareness of diversity, act more responsibly, and demonstrate improved academic performance.

Instructional Grouping Requirements

The Massachusetts Special Education Regulations 603 CMR 28.00 no longer contains prototypes, but a full range of services and types of placements is still required. It is important to remember that the regulations state that “Size and composition of instructional grouping shall be compatible with the methods and goals in the IEP.”

Instructional grouping for special education classrooms are as follows: *CMR 28.06(6)*:

- Resource Class Ratios (60 % or less of the student’s schedule is spent outside the general education classroom)
 - 8 students to 1 teacher **or**
 - 12 students to 1 teacher and 1 aide **or**
 - 16 students to 1 teacher and 2 aides
- Substantially Separate Class Ratios (more than 60 % of time in outside the general education classroom)
 - 8 students to 1 teacher **or**
 - 12 students to 1 teacher and 1 aide
- If more eligible students move into a school, during the school year, the district has the option to add up to 2 additional students to a class grouping. In this case, the school must notify the Department of Education and the parents of each of the students in that class.
- The age span within a class grouping may not be more than 48 months without a Department of Education waiver.

For more information on special education placement please contact the Parent Training and Information (PTI) project at the Federation for Children with Special Needs. They will help you register for a Basic Rights workshop.

