

Section 2 – Services and Supports

Least Restrictive Environment State Board Rule 160-4-7-.07

LRE Requirements: Written Policies and Procedures

The IDEA mandates that children with disabilities be served in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate. All programs and services must be considered in terms of what is least restrictive for each student. The general education classroom should always be the first consideration. Children with disabilities should be educated in their home school, unless the requirements of the IEP cannot be implemented at the home school. Children should not be removed from their home school if needed services can be provided in that location. Any potentially harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services must be considered in location decisions. Towns County Schools has written policies and procedures to ensure that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities in Georgia shall be educated with children who are not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular class environment occurs only when 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.

Determining Educational Placements

One of the most significant requirements of the IDEA is that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent appropriate. When the IEP team has reviewed the student's progress (present levels of academic achievement and functional performance); decided on the goals and, in some cases, objectives for the next year; and developed a transition plan when needed; the team then considers the kinds of supports and services the student will need in order to meet the goals and the setting in which the services will be provided (Georgia Rule 160-4-7-.07).

The IEP team always begins by considering how the goals can be met in the general education classroom. The team should determine the education services, related services, supplementary aids and services, and assistive technology that are necessary for the student to stay in general education, continue to have access to the Georgia Performance Standards, and meet the goals in the IEP. Examples might include use of an assistive technology device, a behavior intervention plan, support from a paraprofessional or sign language interpreter, or changes in the physical environment such as use of positioning devices for a student with an orthopedic impairment. The IEP team determines the student's needs, services, supports, and/or accommodations that are required to make progress in general education settings.

Access to the General Curriculum

School systems must make available to all students, including those with disabilities, a free appropriate public education (FAPE) beginning at age three. The responsibility for services continues as long as the student continues to be eligible for special education or until age 21. Services set forth in a child's IEP must be provided at no cost to the parent. Children with disabilities should have access to the general academic curriculum as well as a variety of educational programs and services provided for other students including, but not limited to:

- art,
- music,
- physical education,
- prevocational and career development, and
- vocational education

Nonacademic services and extracurricular activities should be provided in a manner that affords children with disabilities an equal opportunity for participation. These services and activities may include:

- counseling services
- athletics
- transportation
- health services
- recreational activities
- special interest groups and clubs

In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, Towns County Schools ensures that the placement decision is made by a group of persons, including the parents, and other persons who are knowledgeable about the child, who understand the meaning of the evaluation data, and the placement options; and is made in conformity with the LRE provisions contained in this rule. The child's placement is determined at least annually and is based on the child's IEP and is as close as possible to the child's home.

Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled. In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs. A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum.

Full Continuum of Alternative Placements

Although the first consideration for services is the regular classroom environment, more restrictive placements may be necessary when needed services cannot be provided in the general education setting. The continuum of alternative services includes instruction in:

- general classes with supplemental aids and materials
- resource class settings
- self-contained settings
- special schools
- home
- hospital or residential facilities

Towns County Schools ensures that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services. This continuum includes the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education (*instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions*); and makes provision for supplementary services (such as a separate class or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement.

LRE Decision Making Process

The IEP team can consider placing the student outside of general education settings **only** when the IEP team has evidence that even with the use of supplemental aids and services, education in general education settings will not be successful. If the student is placed in a setting other than general education settings for a portion of the school day, high expectations for achievement in the Georgia Performance Standards and a plan for moving back into less restrictive settings should continue to be in place. In order to determine LRE IEP teams should:

- Document current levels of performance
- Develop student IEP goals and objectives (if needed)
- Determine whether the goal or objective can be taught in a general education classroom
- Accommodations/modifications/personnel supports/settings
- Determine the alternative placement or community setting where those goals and objectives that cannot be taught in a general classroom can be taught
- Determine additional settings or activities that will provide opportunities for interaction with nondisabled peers
- Evaluate the student's performance on goals and objectives

Location of Services: Preschool Placements

A regular education early childhood program in the public school or community (*such as Head Start, Bright from the Start Pre-Kindergarten, public or private daycare*), and preschool programs with special education services delivered as;

(i) Additional supportive services - The child remains in a regular early childhood program with supplementary aids and services provided to the teacher and/or child to implement the IEP.

The services provided may be from personnel such as paraprofessionals, interpreters, or others).

(ii) Direct services - The child remains in a regular early childhood program with direct services from special education personnel utilizing a consultative, collaborative or co-teaching model.

(iii) The child is in the regular education early childhood program but special education and related services are provided outside a regular education early childhood program.

Placements for children not attending a regular early childhood program

(i) A separate special education program housed in the public school or in a community-based setting, in a separate school or residential school or facility;

(ii) A program provided at home as a natural environment;

(iii) A program provided through service providers in their offices; or

(iv) Any combination of the above and/or other settings based on the child's IEP.

School age placements include

General education classroom with age-appropriate non-disabled peers, if required by the IEP:

(i) Additional supportive services

a. The child remains in regular classroom with supplementary aids and services provided to the teacher and/or child to implement the IEP. The services provided may be from personnel such as paraprofessionals, interpreters, or others.

(ii) Direct services

a. The child remains in the regular classroom with direct services from special education personnel on a consultative, collaborative, or co-teaching basis.

Instruction outside the general classroom for individuals or small groups.**Separate day school or program**

Home-Based instruction may be used as a short-term placement option on occasions when the parent and school system agree at an IEP meeting with the following considerations:

(i). A free and appropriate public education (FAPE) is provided and includes access to the general curriculum and an opportunity to make progress toward the goals and objectives included in the IEP;

(ii) home-based services must be reviewed no less than quarterly by the IEP team; and

(iii) All IEPs that require home-based placements will include a reintegration plan for returning to the school setting.

Hospital/homebound instruction (HHB) is issued for students with disabilities who are placed in a special education program and have a medically diagnosed condition that will significantly interfere with their education and requires them to be restricted to their home or a hospital for a period of time. Towns County Schools provides HHB instruction to students with disabilities, under the requirements found in Georgia rule 160-4-2-.31 Hospital Homebound Services.