

## What Does Least Restrictive Environment Really Mean in Preschool?

---

### What is Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?

LRE stands for **Least Restrictive Environment** — and it is one of the most important rights your child has under special education law.

LRE means that your child has the right to learn **with other children who do not have disabilities**, as much as possible. Special education is not a place — it is support. Your child should not be removed from typical preschool settings unless absolutely necessary to meet their needs.

---

### Why LRE Matters in Preschool

- Being around other children helps build language, social skills, and confidence
  - Inclusive environments support learning through play, peer modeling, and shared routines
  - Research shows that children with disabilities often do better when supported in natural settings
- 

### LRE is a Spectrum

LRE does not mean one-size-fits-all. It means finding the **least amount of separation** needed to help your child succeed.

Here are examples from **least to more restrictive**:

- Attending a **community preschool** with speech therapy provided there
- Attending **Head Start or Pre-K** with special education support built in

- Going to a **blended classroom** (typical children and special education students together)
- Attending a **self-contained special education classroom** with few or no peers without disabilities
- Receiving services **at home** or in a separate setting due to medical or developmental needs

The IEP team must always **start with the least restrictive option** and only move toward more support if it is truly needed.

---

## **What the Law Says**

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

“To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities... are educated with children who are not disabled.” (*IDEA § 300.114*)

Schools must:

- **Consider inclusive settings first**
  - **Justify in writing** if a more restrictive setting is chosen
  - **Support the child** in the chosen environment with services, tools, and accommodations
- 

## **What Other Parents Wish They Knew**

- “I didn’t know my child could stay in their private daycare and still get services.”
  - “They told me the special ed class was the only option — but it wasn’t.”
  - “Once we talked about LRE, the team was more open to flexible ideas.”
- 

## **Parent Reflection Space**

*Use these questions to help prepare for placement discussions.*

- Where does my child feel safe, connected, and successful?
  - What kinds of peers or settings help my child grow?
  - What supports could help my child stay in a more inclusive setting?
  - Do I understand why a certain placement is being recommended?
-

## Sources

- Kansas State Department of Education. (2023). *Placement and LRE Guidance*. Retrieved from <https://www.ksde.org/>
  - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B. (2004). Retrieved from <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>
  - U.S. Department of Education. (2017). *Dear Colleague Letter on Preschool LRE*.
- 

## Important Reminder

*This handout reflects Kansas-specific special education guidance. Always work with your IEP team to make sure your child is supported in the setting that meets their individual needs — with as much inclusion as possible.*