

What Does it Mean to Include Students with Disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)?

What Does Florida Law Say?

In 2013, the Florida Legislature defined inclusion in section 1003.57, Florida Statutes, as follows:

“...a student with a disability receiving education in a general education regular class setting, reflecting natural proportions and age-appropriate heterogeneous groups in core academic and elective or special areas within the school community; a student with a disability is a valued member of the classroom and school community; the teachers and administrators support universal education and have knowledge and support available to enable them to effectively teach all children; and access is provided to technical assistance in best practices, instructional methods, and supports tailored to the student’s needs based on current research. “

What Does the Research Say?

40 years of research shows that students with all types of disabilities who receive services and supports in general education settings:

- gain social and communication skills
- develop good friends and a sense of belonging
- increase participation and independence
- have more academic objectives in their IEPs
- increase academic achievement
- develop positive behaviors
- take part in more school activities
- have fewer absences
- are better prepared for college, career and community living

What Does Federal Law Say?

Section 300.320 of Title 34, Code of Federal Regulations, or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), clearly states that “the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible.”

Public Law 114-95, which is frequently called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was passed in 2015, includes language that strongly supports the education of ALL children, and emphasized many important concepts found in IDEA. One big idea is that students with disabilities are general education students first, which supports the IDEA concept of the least restrictive environment (LRE). So, ALL students are held to high standards and expected to achieve the academic state standards to the extent that they are able.

Parents should always be included on Individual Education Plan (IEP) teams where decisions are made about their child’s educational services and placement. In addition to determining the location of services and the amount of time spent in general education settings for each student, IEP teams should establish the supports and services that the student will need to make progress by carefully considering the degree of progress to allow for a Free, Appropriate, Public Education (34 C.F.R. § 300.301).

What Does the LRE Look Like?

Tyrone is an energetic nine-year-old fourth-grader. He loves sports and goes right from school to soccer practice every day with a group of his classmates. Tyrone has learning disabilities, and his reading comprehension is at an early second grade level. He needs special education services, but like most kids, the last thing he wants is to be different. Fortunately, the principal at Tyrone's school understands the benefits of providing support for students with disabilities in general education settings, where general and exceptional student educators work together. In Tyrone's fourth grade class, the general education teacher uses flexible groupings of students for different activities. She plans lessons using Universal Design for Learning principles, so everyone can learn. For reading, Tyrone receives additional support in a small group, but he doesn't have to leave the classroom. His exceptional student education (ESE) teacher provides specially designed instruction in the general education classroom, for him and a few other students. Every week Tyrone's teachers plan ways to adapt the content, teaching methods or delivery of instruction to help Tyrone and others learn. Tyrone's parents meet often with the teachers to share ideas about what works for him. Tyrone is supported through the collaboration of his teachers and his family.



What does LRE look like?

For Tyrone, it looks like progressing within the standards as well as progress on his IEP. It looks like he'll be in 5th grade with his friends next year!

A year ago, fourteen-year-old Kayla was in a separate or self-contained classroom with other students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. Kayla is a cheerful, outgoing girl with Down syndrome. She had been in a self-contained classroom since kindergarten. There had been no opportunities for Kayla to be around her peers without disabilities, either in the classroom or in school activities.

Kayla's parents were concerned that she was not reaching her potential academically or socially. Seeing her as a teenager, they realized that Kayla needed to be prepared for her future. They talked to Kayla's exceptional education teacher about their concerns. An IEP team meeting was scheduled with a representative from the district's ESE office, Kayla's parents, the ESE teacher, a general education teacher, the speech therapist, and a paraprofessional. Kayla was part of the meeting, too. At the meeting, Kayla's IEP goals were reviewed, and a plan was developed for providing special materials and instructional methods for Kayla to participate in several general education classes. The school administration arranged for professional learning for the general education and electives teachers on ways to teach students with different learning abilities. The teachers found what they learned useful for teaching many students, not just students with disabilities.

Kayla's school implemented the Peers as Partners in Learning course to start a program where general education students support students with disabilities. Kayla was assigned a peer support student who supported her with schoolwork and class transitions. Her peer support student also became her link to making friends. Kayla is doing well in school, earning A's and B's using Florida's Alternative Academic Achievement Standards - Access Points - to learn the course standards. Her social gains are just as great.



What does LRE look like?

For Kayla, it looks like access to the standards as well as progress on her IEP. It looks like joining her friends at the school dance, the skating rink, the mall, and at her first sleep over!

Planning for the LRE for Your Child

8 Steps to Get Involved

Step 1: Create a list of things that describe your child. Include your child's strengths, challenges, interests, learning needs, health/medical information, and future dreams.

Step 2: Do your homework about the LRE. Check out our website and federal and state legislation related to your child's IEP.

Step 3: Ask for a meeting with your child's teacher to review your child's information and discuss questions 1-10 below.

Step 4: Be ready to share your vision for your child's educational future and what you have learned about the LRE.

Step 5: State your willingness to be a partner on your child's team throughout the year, and not just at the IEP meeting. After all, you are an expert when it comes to your child!

Step 6: Ask for an IEP team meeting to discuss opportunities for your child to spend time in the LRE at your school.

Step 7: Ask your child's team to contact FIN for assistance in planning for student supports.

Step 8: Be open-minded! Effective supports take time, effort, resources, creativity, and collaboration. Trust that your child's team wants the very best for your child.

What Makes the LRE Work?

- Support from the principal and other administrators
- A school vision, attitudes, and beliefs that value all students
- A plan for that allows for continuous improvement of best practices
- Collaborative educational teams that include parents as partners
- Flexible approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment
- A variety of instructional methods for different kinds of learners
- Curriculum and assessments that are adapted to meet individual student needs
- Ongoing learning opportunities for families and staff.

10 Questions to Guide Your Thinking

When planning educational opportunities for your child, you and your child's education team should consider the following questions together:

1. Is it important for your child to learn, play and work side-by-side with students without disabilities?
2. Can your child benefit from teachers who have high expectations for ALL children?
3. Does your child learn best when a variety of teaching methods are provided?
4. Is it important for your child to focus on goals that are connected to his or her interests, learning styles, future dreams, and unique needs?
5. Do you want your child to learn about things that are related to what their peers in the school are learning?
6. Do you want your child to feel good about what he or she accomplishes in school?
7. Do you believe there are peers in your child's school that can serve as good role models for learning, communicating, and socializing?
8. Is it important for your child to share tasks, solve problems, and develop friendships with their peers?
9. Do you want your child to learn strategies that will help him or her continue to learn after graduation?
10. Is it important to prepare your child for a successful and happy adult life that includes living, working, enjoying recreation, and socializing with other adults in the community?

Did you know that ALL of this can be accomplished in the LRE?

What is the Florida Inclusion Network (FIN)?

The Florida Inclusion Network collaborates with all districts, schools, and discretionary projects to provide customized services and supports ensuring all students with disabilities have the same educational, social, and future opportunities as their peers.

What services does FIN provide?

FIN uses a data-driven problem-solving approach with districts and schools to focus on best practices for inclusive education; provides professional learning, technical assistance, coaching and resources to increase and maintain knowledge and skills; and shares information to help build collaborative relationships between families, schools, and districts.

Who are FIN services for?

FIN services are available for families, educators, administrators, and community members.

How can FIN help?

Your FIN facilitator can provide you with information and materials that can assist you as you begin planning with the school for your child's education in the least restrictive environment.

Additionally, your child's teacher(s) or school administrator can request FIN services (e.g., school-based consultation, professional learning, and technical assistance) for school teams and staff members. The goal of the Florida Inclusion Network is to provide assistance that will support positive outcomes for students with disabilities at your child's school. Our services are free to all Florida schools!



Scan the QR code to read our other F.A.C.T. Folios!



Find your FIN facilitator on our website:

www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com

or call toll-free 1-888-232-0421