



# What's the Big IDEA? #14

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. This series is designed to offer information about IDEA as amended in 2004. Each fact sheet will focus on a different aspect of IDEA.

## Educational Placement

### *What is placement?*

When we are talking about special education, we tend to think of placement as the physical location where the student will be receiving special education services. However, placement is much more than this. Placement actually refers to the student's entire program; it is a combination of the services, supports, and the least restrictive environment where the services will be delivered. A change of placement occurs when either the services or the location where services are provided is changed.

You are at your daughter's IEP meeting. As the team develops her IEP, various areas need to be discussed. For example, the team will review her current performance (present levels) and write goals and objectives for the next year. As the team discusses the type of program she needs to help her reach her goals, you are now discussing *placement*. Placement will include discussion/decisions about the services and supports that will be provided and the best location to provide those services and supports.



***Placement = Services + Location***

### *What does IDEA say about placement?*

IDEA states that parents must be involved in placement decisions (34 CFR Section 300.501). You are the expert on your child, so you need to be part of the team that makes placement decisions. If you are unable to attend a meeting where a placement decision will be made, the school must reschedule the meeting or arrange for a conference call, video conferencing, or maybe a home visit. The only time the school is allowed to make a placement decision without a parent is if the school has tried, but been unable to obtain the parent's involvement. If this is the case, the school must have a record of repeated unsuccessful attempts to meet.

The principle of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) needs to guide the team's decisions about the amount of special education services the child should receive and where those services should be provided. IDEA is clear - students with disabilities need to be educated with their age-appropriate, non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. LRE is determined *individually* for each child based on his or her needs and abilities.

Placement also refers to nonacademic and extracurricular activities offered by the school. IDEA (34 CFR Section 300.117) states that “Nonacademic and extracurricular activities and services, including meals and recess periods, must ensure that children with disabilities participate with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the student.”

Each school is required to provide a continuum of placement options for students. The least restrictive environment is generally considered to be the general education classroom. The team should consider this placement first, along with any additional supports the student and teacher need to be successful. IDEA states that a child with a disability should not be removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because he/she needs modifications in the general education curriculum.

### ***What do we need to think about when deciding on placement?***

The IEP team needs to consider the child’s individual needs and the pros and cons of various placements. For example, if the student leaves the general education classroom for part of the day, what subject is he/she missing? You will want to make sure your child is not missing a core subject area such as math in order to get more reading instruction. Make sure you know what your child’s schedule will be. Sometimes teams think that they will schedule resource room time when the rest of the class is



having an activity such as art. In this case, the child will feel like going to the resource room is a punishment. The rest of the class is enjoying an art lesson and he or she has to leave. What if art is the main reason the child wants to go to school? If the child needs intensive reading instruction, can he or she get it in the general education classroom? Can the special education teacher come in during reading time? Can the student get double reading instruction? The school should always be striving to bring the specialized services into the general education classroom. Ideally, teachers should move, not children.

***Special Education is a service . . . not a place.***

LRE is not the same as inclusion. Inclusion is a philosophy – a point of view that everyone should be included and welcomed in the school. Inclusion is not a legal requirement under IDEA. In fact, a school can not say they only offer inclusion classrooms. They must meet each student’s individual needs. There are children who are highly distracted in the general education environment. What are some options for this student? Is it better for this student to sit at a study carrel in a general education classroom or is it actually less restrictive for the child to work with a small group of students in a quiet environment? The IEP team will make this decision after careful consideration of all of the pros and cons for the student. You know your child best; make sure you understand all of the possible placement options for your child so you can make an informed decision.

*If you would like to discuss your child’s classroom or school placement, call Parents Reaching Out at 1-800-524-5176 and ask to speak with a PTI family liaison. We are happy to help you.*

*“What’s the Big IDEA?” fact sheets are developed by Parents Reaching Out under a grant from the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education. Views expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the federal government.*