



Data Exploration Guide:



Improving Educational Environment Rates

for Families of Elementary Students

WHAT IS THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT DATA DASHBOARD?

This online tool shows information about where students with disabilities receive their education – in general education classrooms, resource rooms, self-contained classrooms, or specialized schools. It helps families understand how their school compares to others.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is a cornerstone of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is closely tied to the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This federal special education law affirms the civil rights of students with disabilities by emphasizing that they should be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The principle of LRE is about ensuring that students with disabilities have access to an inclusive learning environment while still receiving the individualized supports and services they need to succeed.

WHY EXAMINE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT (LRE) DATA?

Educational environment data reflect the number of students with disabilities, ages 3 to 21, placed in general education settings to varying degrees throughout the school day. This tool compares educational environment data at the national, state and local levels. While special education is a service—not a place—and LRE decisions are based on individual student needs, this data emphasizes the importance of promoting a full continuum of placement options, meaningful inclusive opportunities, and appropriate supplementary aids and services.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER FOR YOUR CHILD?

- Research shows students with disabilities often have better outcomes when included with peers.
- Elementary years are especially important for building social connections and foundational skills.
- Inclusion benefits all students by fostering understanding of differences.
- Early inclusive experiences can shape long-term educational pathways.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

What information has been provided about my parental rights? How do I access and participate in the development of the IEP and the placement decision-making process?

How much time does my child spend with their peers without disabilities?

What supports are available to help my child succeed in general education?

How does my school's inclusion rate compare to other schools in our district or state?

Are there opportunities for my child to participate in all school activities?

If my child is in a specialized program, what inclusion opportunities exist?

HOW FAMILIES OF ELEMENTARY STUDENTS TAKE ACTION



INQUIRE & PLAN

Ask about inclusive opportunities and a plan to move towards a less restrictive setting during IEP team discussions



CONNECT

Connect with other parents through your district's Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG) to share experiences



COMMUNICATE

Advocate for appropriate supports to help your child succeed in less restrictive settings and activities



AWARENESS

View your district's data before IEP meetings to understand local patterns