



Data Exploration Guide:



Improving Educational Environment Rates

for District Leaders and Leadership Teams

This guide helps district leaders and leadership teams to explore educational environment data to foster meaningful discussions towards maximizing inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities.

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.

HOW CAN DISTRICT LEADERS USE THIS DATA?

- Analyze placement patterns across disability categories, grade levels, and demographic groups.
- Identify transition points where inclusion rates decrease (e.g., elementary to middle school).
- Compare schools within your district to identify successful inclusion models.
- Examine staffing patterns and professional development needs.
- Target resources where greatest opportunity gaps exist.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

Where do our inclusion rates drop significantly by grade level or disability category?

How do placement decisions compare between schools with similar populations?

Are certain student groups (e.g. students with autism) disproportionately placed in more restrictive settings? What are the barriers to inclusion?

How are placement decisions made during the development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP), including parent/guardian and student input?

How are we measuring the district's practice and progress in implementing inclusive practices?

HOW DISTRICT LEADERS AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS CAN TAKE ACTION



CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Create a district inclusion team to review data and develop action plans



SERVICE DELIVERY

Review scheduling and staffing to support inclusive service delivery, including co-teaching models and collaborative planning



ENGAGEMENT

Engage families in discussions about inclusive opportunities and participation during the development of the IEP



PROMOTE LEARNING

Ensure staff understands LRE and aligns practices and procedures to promote meaningful access and opportunity