



Data Exploration Guide:

Improving Educational Environment Rates for Principals and School Leaders

This guide helps principals and school leaders to explore educational environment data to foster meaningful discussions and maximize 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 LEADERS USE THIS DATA?

- Analyze patterns by grade level, teacher, and disability category within your school.
- Identify transition points where inclusion rates decrease (e.g., elementary to middle school).
- Identify and promote successful inclusion models within your building to scale up (e.g., push-in vs. pull-out).
- Track changes in placement patterns over time to measure improvement.
- Use data to guide staffing decisions and professional development planning.

KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

- How does our school culture support or create barriers to inclusion?
- What do our master schedule and staffing patterns say about our commitment to inclusion?
- Are our general education teachers prepared and supported to teach diverse learners?
- How do we ensure meaningful inclusion rather than just physical presence?
- What systems do we have for monitoring student progress in inclusive settings?
- In what ways does the Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS) process ensure that students are included in the general education environment to the greatest extent possible?

HOW PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL LEADERS CAN TAKE ACTION

CULTURE

Establish a shared vision for inclusive education among all staff

STAFFING

Consider collaborative teaching models and flexible staffing arrangements

SCHEDULING

Create time for collaborative planning

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Prioritize training on High Leverage Practices and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

FAMILIES AS PARTNERS

Communicate your school's commitment to inclusion with families

RESOURCES

Ensure materials, technology, and supports reach general education classrooms