

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Compliance Checklist

Placement Decision-Making Under 34 CFR §300.114–300.120

Purpose: LRE is one of the most frequently cited compliance findings in IDEA monitoring. This checklist helps IEP teams document a legally sound, individualized placement decision — grounded in the presumption that children with disabilities are educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate — and helps administrators audit placement files for defensible documentation.

1. Continuum of Alternative Placements

- ☐ District maintains and can demonstrate a full continuum of placement options (§300.115): general education with supports, resource room, self-contained, separate school, homebound/hospital, residential.
- ☐ Continuum is genuinely available district-wide, not only at select buildings, absent an individualized, documented exception.

2. Individualized Determination

- ☐ Placement decision is made by a group that includes the parent and persons knowledgeable about the child, evaluation data, and placement options (§300.116(a)).
- ☐ Placement is determined at least annually and is based on the child's IEP, not on disability category, available space, administrative convenience, or funding.
- ☐ Placement is as close as possible to the child's home; unless the IEP requires otherwise, the child attends the school they would attend if not disabled.

3. Documenting the Removal Rationale

- ☐ IEP includes a specific statement of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and extracurricular/nonacademic activities.
- ☐ File documents supplementary aids and services, accommodations, and general-education interventions that were considered before removing the child from the general education setting.
- ☐ Rationale explains why education in the general education setting with supplementary aids and services could not be achieved satisfactorily — not merely that a more restrictive setting is available or convenient.
- ☐ A child is not removed from age-appropriate general education solely because of needed modifications to the general curriculum.

4. Nonacademic & Extracurricular Settings

- ☐ Team has considered participation in nonacademic and extracurricular services/activities (meals, recess, clubs, assemblies) with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate (§300.117).
- ☐ Transportation, if provided as a related service, does not unnecessarily separate the child from nondisabled peers.

5. Monitoring Over Time

- ☐ Placement is revisited at each annual review with current data — not carried over by default from the prior year.
- ☐ If a more restrictive placement is proposed, PWN documents why less restrictive options were rejected.
- ☐ District tracks LRE data (e.g., % of time in general education) consistent with SPP/APR Indicator 5 reporting requirements and reviews trends for disproportionality by disability category, race, or building.

6. Common Compliance Pitfalls

- ☐ Placement driven by disability label/category rather than individual need.
- ☐ "One size fits all" program models applied without individualized consideration.
- ☐ Missing documentation of supplementary aids/services considered before a more restrictive setting.
- ☐ Blanket exclusion from field trips, assemblies, or extracurriculars without individualized review.

Evidence Base & Sources

- 34 CFR §300.114–300.120 (Least Restrictive Environment requirements).
- Board of Education v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176 (1982), and subsequent circuit LRE tests (e.g., Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education; Oberti v. Board of Education) synthesizing the two-part LRE inquiry.
- OSEP guidance and SPP/APR Indicator 5 (Educational Environments) technical assistance materials, IDEA Data Center.
- National Center for Learning Disabilities & CPIR — practitioner guidance on individualized LRE decision-making.

This resource synthesizes federal statute, regulation, and peer-reviewed / technical-assistance-center guidance current as of publication. It is an instructional tool, not legal advice; consult your district's legal counsel and current state regulations for compliance decisions.