



June 30, 2022

Standards of Professional Learning for Least Restrictive Environment

Introduction

These Standards for Professional Learning describe the context, processes, and content for effective, high-quality professional learning relative to the least restrictive environment (LRE) for individuals eligible for special education. The Standards for Professional Learning are established by the Iowa Administrative Rule 281—83.6(284) and *Leaning Forward* (Roy, 2013) and the application of these standards as they apply to Least Restrictive Environment is a requirement set out by Iowa Code 256.9(62).

These standards set clear expectations for professional learning at the state, AEA, district, and building levels. The standards guide the efforts of individuals, teams, school, and school system faculty, public offices, institutes of higher education, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations engaged in setting policy, organizing, facilitating, managing, monitoring, or measuring professional learning to increase educator effectiveness and student achievement in the least restrictive environment. They are to be considered as an integrated whole, not in isolation.

Least Restrictive Environment in Iowa

In Iowa, the term least restrictive environment refers to environments throughout the entire day where students eligible for special education can receive the instruction and support needed for a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that allows s/he to make progress, access general education and experience social benefit in light of impact upon others in the classroom *beginning with the fact that all students are general education students first*. While this fact is the appropriate starting place, it has been misinterpreted to mean nearly all students must be placed in the general education classroom, with paraprofessional assistance if needed. There have also been misinterpretations that students with aggressive and dangerous behaviors must be placed in a segregated/therapeutic setting, and that this is always the LRE for such students. Future professional development in Iowa needs to support the ideas that IEP teams must consider both the continuum of placement option that is most inclusive, in conjunction with considering what placement will allow substantive growth. To meet its substantive obligation under the IDEA, a school must offer an IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to *make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances* (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 137 S. Ct. 988 (2017)). Students placed in general education settings, but not experiencing growth, are not placed in the LRE. At times, IEP teams may be able to design SDI or develop behavior plans that allow this growth to occur in regular classroom settings. However, IEP teams must consider the full continuum of placement options, and the idea that some students need a more segregated setting to experience substantive growth. A framework of standards for addressing LRE through professional development is presented in table 1 below. In the future, guidance will be issued to assist districts with implementation of the standards.

Table 1

Standard for Professional Learning	Core Elements	LRE Content
<p>LEARNING COMMUNITIES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage in continuous improvement • Develop collective responsibility • Create alignment and accountability 	<p>Administrators, general educators and special educators understand/believe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students are general education students first; • All educators/adults have the collective responsibility to provide the support needed for each student to be educated in the least restrictive environment; • Least restrictive environment is individually determined based on what the <i>student needs</i> in order to learn; • The ultimate goal is for students to receive education in environments where they make progress, access general education and to the maximum extent possible are educated with peers without disabilities; • In the need to review each student’s LRE at least annually; • The regulatory requirements and know the difference between LRE, location, placement and the district’s continuum options.
<p>LEADERSHIP: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop collective responsibility • Create alignment and accountability 	<p>Administrators and building leaders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor data to identify professional learning or other supports needed to ensure FAPE; • Create support systems & structures for students to receive services and supports in age appropriate regular classrooms; • Create support systems & structures to return students to district/building when the student has been moved to a more segregated environment.
<p>LEARNING DESIGNS: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply learning theories, research, and models. • Select learning designs. • Promote active engagement. 	<p>Higher education, AEA, administrators and leadership teams implement professional learning that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use practices that support adult learning; • Promote active engagement of adult learners; • Results in a change in adult practice.

Standard for Professional Learning	Core Elements	LRE Content
<p>IMPLEMENTATION: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students, applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply change research. • Sustain implementation. • Provide constructive feedback. 	<p>Educators and service providers will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan or co-plan regarding the IEP services and supports needed for each child; • Implement identified services and supports for each child in order to support that student in the least restrictive environment; • Prepare colleagues and/or paraprofessionals to implement student-specific expected IEP practices (e.g., student-specific BIP, providing accommodations); • Provide feedback to the IEP team on the efficacy of current practices. <p>IEP teams will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review individual student data and make data-based decisions about each individual student's least restrictive environment; • Facilitate discussions and weigh various factors in making decisions about a student's placement including such things as why the required services can/cannot be provided in general education, the potential detriment to the student and/or impact on other students. • Identify the IEP services and supports needed for each child to participate in the least restrictive environment, including training of teachers and paraprofessionals, when appropriate; • Use the feedback from the educator(s) and/or service provider(s) to guide changes made to each student's IEP.

Standard for Professional Learning	Core Elements	LRE Content
<p>OUTCOMES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet performance standards. • Address learning outcomes. • Build coherence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodations, modifications and outcomes are individualized to support learning in age appropriate regular classrooms. • Regulatory requirements for LRE, location, placement and continuum options are understood and appropriately applied. • Individual student LRE is reviewed annually and any needed changes to increase student success and maximize education with peers without disabilities are identified and provided. • A change in placement is considered only after all available options and supports have been tried or considered in the student’s regular classroom, with appropriate documentation and justification.