

# FAPE, LRE, and Natural Environments: What Birth – Grade 12 Leaders Need to Know



## Overview

Understanding the principles of **natural environments** under Part C of IDEA, and **free appropriate public education (FAPE)** and **least restrictive environment (LRE)** under Part B of IDEA, is crucial for administrators of schools and other community-based programs. These concepts ensure every child is educated in settings that appropriately support their individual needs and development. By understanding these principles of Part B and Part C of IDEA, leaders can create more effective and supportive environments where children with disabilities can learn and thrive.

## What Does the IDEA Say?

**Natural Environments (for early intervention):** Natural environments refer to settings that are natural or typical for a same-aged infant or toddler without a disability. These settings may include the home or community-based settings and must be consistent with the provisions of the IDEA.

IDEA Section: [34 CFR §303.26](#)

**FAPE:** FAPE refers to special education and related services that are provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge. These services must meet the standards of the State Education agency, include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education, and be provided in conformity with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

IDEA Section: [34 CFR §300.101](#)

**LRE:** LRE means that children with disabilities should be educated with children who are nondisabled to the maximum extent appropriate. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment should occur only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

IDEA Section: [34 CFR §300.114](#)

## Natural Environments, FAPE, and LRE: The Leader's Role

### Natural Environments

- Natural environments are everyday settings typical for same-aged infants and toddlers without disabilities, such as home or community settings.
- Early intervention services for infants and toddlers (birth to age 3) are provided in natural environments to the maximum extent appropriate.
- Services are provided in everyday routines, activities, and places to support development.

Leaders ensure early intervention services support families and caregivers in leveraging natural learning opportunities for children.

## FAPE

- The goal of FAPE is to ensure meaningful progress for children with disabilities, preparing them for further education, employment, and independent living.
- FAPE is a principle of IDEA that requires special education and related services to be provided **at public expense, under public supervision, without charge, and in conformity with an IEP.**
- FAPE must meet State education agency standards and include appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary education.

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## LRE

- The goal of **LRE** is to provide access to the general education curriculum and environment as much as possible.
- LRE requires students with disabilities be educated with non-disabled peers **to the maximum extent appropriate.**
- Any removal from the general education environment only occurs if education cannot be achieved satisfactorily with supplementary aids and services.
- A continuum of alternative placements must be available and used to meet individual student needs.
- LRE decisions are made by the IEP team based on the individual needs of each student.

Establishing procedures, protocols, and structures to ensure that a free and appropriate public education is provided in the least restrictive environment for every student.

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Consider how you can strengthen your own leadership practices and reinforce effective learning environments that support the provision of appropriate specially designed instruction and developmental services for children with disabilities.

## Additional Resources

- **IDEA website:** [U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#).
- **IRIS Center module:** [Creating a School Environment that Facilitates Success for All Students: A Model for School Leaders](#)
- **IRIS Center module:** [Early Childhood Environments: Designing Effective Classrooms](#)
- **IRIS Center information brief:** [Least Restrictive Environment \(LRE\)](#).
- **CEC Division for Early Childhood:** [DEC Recommended Practices: Leadership](#)

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This material was produced under the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H325Z230007. Anna Macedonia serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned on this website is intended or should be inferred.