

Least Restrictive Environment
Proposed Recommendation
July 8, 2024

Many of the standards, policies, and procedures suggested in the Workgroup's previous recommendations are also essential for increasing placements of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and decreasing the variability of Maryland's LRE placements (across LEAs, disability categories, race, and assessment type). These previous recommendations include:

- Achievement of grade-level standards by all students with disabilities, ¹ establishing the legal requirements of the IEP process, and holding LEAs accountable for implementation (Rec 1, 2, and 8)
 - <Note> ¹ Students who are eligible for participation in the alternate assessment must have meaningful access to and make progress in grade-level content standards, and meet alternate academic achievement standards.
- Increased resources (Rec 10–12)
- Standards related to: evidence-based specially designed instruction (Rec 4), staffing plans and service delivery models allocations (Rec 9), and positions like paraprofessionals and IEP chairs (Rec 9)
- Direct support and coaching of IEP teams and LEAs from MSDE (Rec 5)
- Ensuring educators and administrators have the requisite knowledge, skills, and expertise through EPPs, professional learning, and licensure requirements (Rec7)

In addition, the Workgroup recommends that:

MSDE should develop a plan for a plan with specific tasks and timelines within 60 days to decrease variability of LRE data by LEA, race, disability category, and assessment type, and increase placements in general education classrooms (decreasing placements in LRE C and separate schools). The plan should include:

- Standards, guidance, technical assistance, and monitoring focused on:
 - the use of supplementary aids and services,
 - implementation of evidence-based specially designed instruction;
 - eligibility determinations for disability categories;
 - MTSS implementation; and
 - master schedules.
- LEA action plans on LRE, reviewed and approved by MSDE, with mechanisms for accountability;
- Support from MSDE to increase the capacity of schools to meet the needs of all students including:
 - Guidance on seeking out and providing additional resources and support for students, schools, and LEAs needed throughout the year;
 - Direct consultation with inclusion experts where staff can bring questions, issues, and particular student situations for practical advice;
 - Formal mechanisms for sharing expertise and connecting schools/LEAs to outside experts, professional learning, and mental/behavioral health experts.
 - Enhanced standards and guidance for documenting, justifying, and monitoring students being recommended for more restrictive environments, particularly the most restrictive environments. (Changed from "Additional requirements for documentation, justification, and review for moving students to more restrictive environments, particularly the most restrictive environments.")