

MAINE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

Least Restrictive Environment in Early Childhood Special Education: Understanding LRE and FAPE in Preschool Settings

Presented by: Early Childhood Special Education Team



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Session Topics

- FAPE, the Continuum of Placement Options and LRE Definitions
- Describe how LRE can be implemented in Cohort SAUs
- Making LRE Decisions in IEP Meetings
- Q&A's

FAPE, LRE and the Continuum of Placement Options

Definitions, Regulations, Rationale



FAPE Requirement for Preschool

- **Free**— Special education provided at public expense, under public supervision, at no cost to the parent
- **Appropriate**—Special education that meets the standards of the SEA; For preschool children, designed to participate in appropriate activities; Confers meaningful educational benefit, in Least Restrictive Environment
- **Public**—Special education offered by the SAU in an appropriate preschool, elementary school, or secondary school in the state
- **Education**—an education program that is provided in conformity with an individualized education program (IEP)

How This Applies to Maine

- FAPE will look different from site to site
 - FAPE looks different because it is individually determined and because each community is different
- General Education Opportunities:
 - Public PreK programs in some SAUs
 - Head Start in some communities
 - Childcare in some communities
 - Kindergarten classrooms
- IEP teams will look at each child's needs, their goals, and services to ensure a FAPE in the mixed delivery system.





Least Restrictive Environment Categories in Early Childhood Special Education

Attending a Regular Early Childhood Program
(more than 50% non-disabled children)

REC10YSVCS

AT LEAST 10 hours per week; receiving majority of special education and related services in REGULAR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

REC09YSVCS

LESS THAN 10 hours per week; receiving majority of special education and related services in REGULAR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM

REC10YOTHLOC

REGULAR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM, more than 10 hours per week, services in some other location

REC09YOTHLOC

REGULAR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM, less than 10 hours per week, services in some other location

Attending a Special Education Program Only
(less than 50% non-disabled children)

SC

Children attending a separate class, majority of children in class have a disability, NOT in a Regular Early Childhood Program

SS

Children attending a special education program, NOT in any regular early childhood program; Specifically, in a separate school

RF

Children attending a special education program; Specifically, a residential facility or in-patient hospital

Not Attending a Regular or
Special Education Classroom

SPL

Children are neither attending a regular early childhood program or special education program, majority of hours of special education and related services at the service provider's location

H

Children attending neither a regular early childhood program nor a special education program, and receiving the majority of hours of special education and related services at home

LRE Requirements

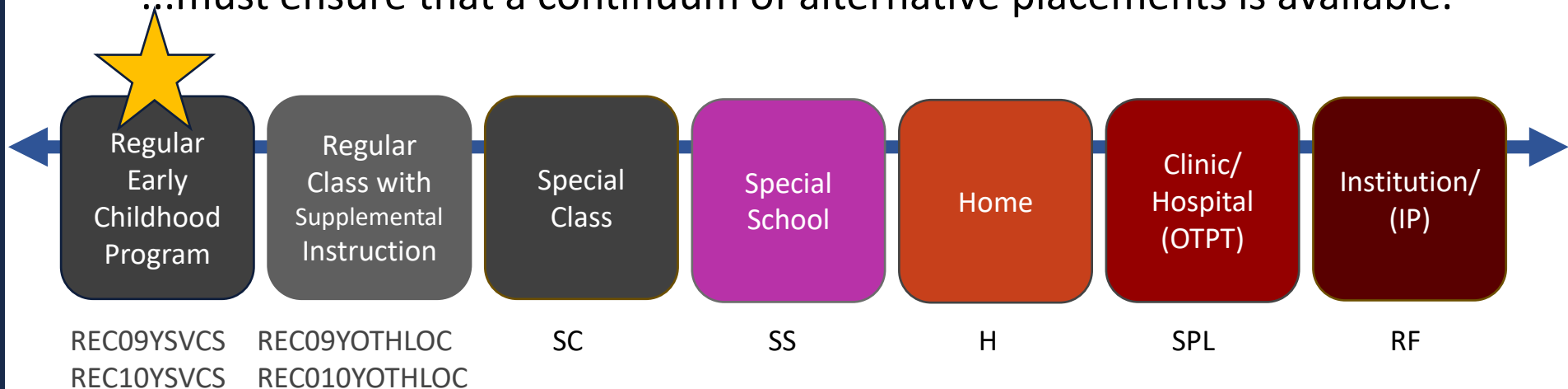
Each public agency must ensure that—

- To the **maximum extent appropriate**, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, **are educated with children who are nondisabled**; and
- Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment **occurs 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**.

Continuum of Placement Options

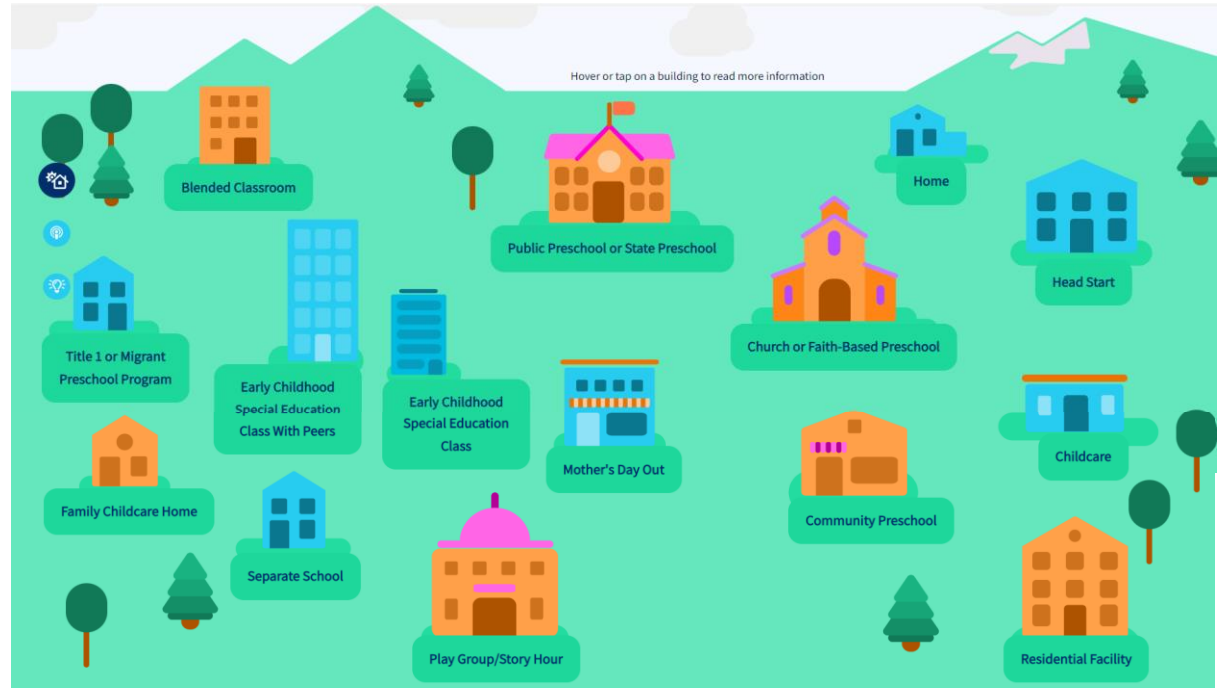
Least Restrictive to Most Restrictive

...must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available.



Goal: Inclusion in a Mixed Delivery System

- A variety of settings can support the delivery of Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) in the least restrictive setting for the child.
- A Regular Early Childhood Program is the least restrictive—the majority of children in the class are non-disabled



Placements and Settings

Examples of the ways SAUs can offer options along the continuum

Placements and Settings Examples

Continuum of Placement Options

Setting/Location Examples

More Restrictive

Regular Early Childhood Program (RECP)

Head Start program with services delivered in the program
Childcare classroom with services delivered in the program
SAU public PreK program with services delivered in the classroom

RECP + Other Locations

Head Start program with services delivered outside of that classroom, the child travels to a different location for services

Separate Classroom

SAU or SPPS classroom, and the majority of children in the classroom have a disability

Separate School

Child attends a separate school for children with disabilities, e.g. school for blind/hearing impaired

Home

Child is at home, does not attend any other program, and services are provided in the home

Service Provider Location

Child is at home, does not attend a program, and receives a service outside of the home, e.g., clinical setting on outpatient basis

LRE and FAPE: Decisions on the Continuum of Placement Options

IT SHOULD:

- Individualized, promotes progress with identified goals
- Allows for access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum
- Provide access to peers without disabilities to the maximum extent possible

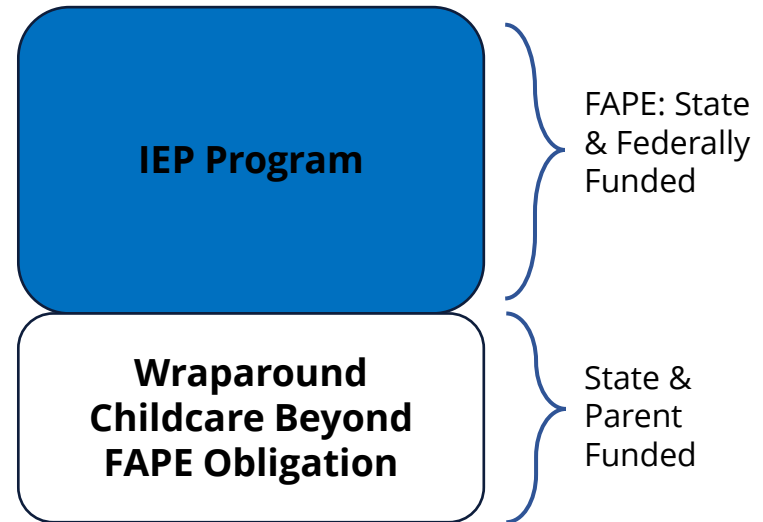
IT SHOULD NOT BE BASED ON:

- Availability of programs
- SAU resources
- Staffing convenience

LRE Decisions in IEP Meetings

FAPE in Early Childhood Special Education

- IEP programs can be implemented in a variety of learning environments.
- The child's IEP outlines the goals, supports, and services needed to access and make progress in the early learning curriculum.
- Families may need additional supports, beyond what is offered as part of a public preschool education program, such as wraparound childcare.



IEP Team Discussion Steps to Identify the LRE

1. Understanding the Current Learning Setting



2. Exploring Child's Daily Routines and Needs



3. Considering Supports and Services



4. Deciding on the Best Setting for Progress





Settings: Appropriate Factors to Consider



- Current setting
- Services needed
- Least restrictive
- Location closest to home
- Transportation time
- Site qualifications
- Appropriate learning activities



Rising Stars and MRTQ Supports



RISING STARS FOR ME
Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System

- Partnerships between SAUs and childcare programs
- 3-Star rating requirements
- 2 Star with application for waiver

Research and References

- IDEA Regulations for FAPE and LRE
 - [Sec. 300.17 Free appropriate public education - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)
 - [Sec. 300.114 LRE requirements - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)
- Lawrence, S., Smith, S., & Banerjee, R. (2016). Preschool inclusion: Key findings from research and implications for policy. National Center for Children in Poverty, Research Connections.
[https://www.researchconnections.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Preschool Inclusion Research Brief 2016.pdf](https://www.researchconnections.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Preschool%20Inclusion%20Research%20Brief%202016.pdf)
- [Preschool LRE Dear Colleague Letter](#)
- [Policy Statement on Inclusion Of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs, US Department of Education and US Department of Health and Human Services](#)
- [Rising Stars and MRTQ](#)

Questions?

- Please share questions in the chat or unmute and share question with the group.
- Your Regional Specialist may best answer questions that are site-specific.

Contact the Early Childhood Special Education Team

Get In Touch

“Supporting Schools to Meet the Needs of Young Children with Disabilities”



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