



Special education environments

Where students with autism spend their school time

To receive federal funding, states must first meet the standards set by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). IDEA mandates that students with disabilities must be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the greatest

extent appropriate. This rule attempts to eliminate the discrimination that might arise from placing special education students in separate classrooms or schools. Every school must make an effort to integrate students with disabilities into the regular

curriculum and provide the tools and services that are necessary for their success. Only when these efforts fail is it appropriate to place a child in a different classroom. All of the eligibility requirements in IDEA can be found here: <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>

What does Least Restrictive Environment mean?

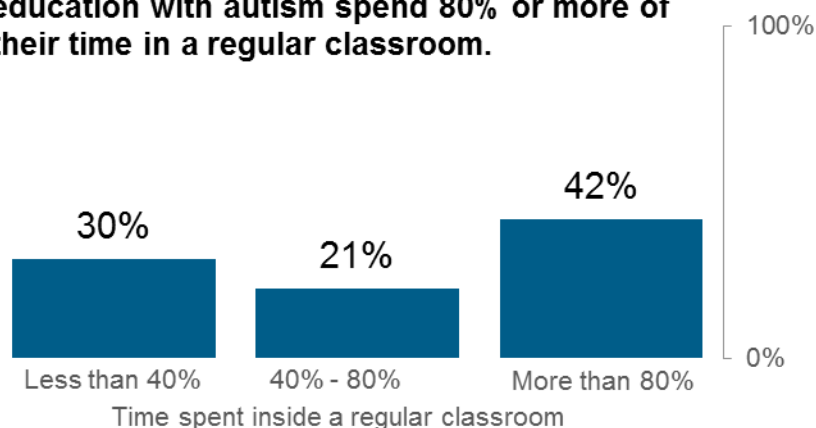
IDEA does not describe what the least restrictive environment must look like, so states individually interpret what LRE means. Some think that the general education setting should always be tried first, whereas others believe that LREs should be more customizable.

To avoid placing a child in an envi-

ronment that is unduly restrictive, it is important to move from the least to most restrictive option. If a child does not benefit from a regular education setting, then they may need to be moved to a more restrictive environment. The more time a special education student spends in a typical classroom, the less restrictive that environment is considered

to be. The national average percentage of students with autism who spent 80% or more of their school day in a regular classroom is 46%, but that number varies greatly by state. This finding suggests that different states have different interpretations of the LRE rule.

Less than half of children in special education with autism spend 80% or more of their time in a regular classroom.



State Rankings

What percent of students in the autism special education category spend more than 80% of their time in a general education classroom?

Percent of students with ASD spending more than 80% of their time in a regular classroom

Number of students

<i>State</i>	<i>Percent of students with ASD spending more than 80% of their time in a regular classroom</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
Iowa	65%	424
Nebraska	62%	1602
Alabama	61%	3290
North Dakota	58%	437
Vermont	56%	528
Indiana	54%	7149
New Hampshire	54%	1139
Wisconsin	53%	4928
Colorado	53%	2546
Minnesota	53%	7921
Oregon	51%	4067
Connecticut	51%	3514
Rhode Island	50%	1005
Idaho	47%	1061
Michigan	46%	7041
Wyoming	45%	342
Kansas	45%	1443
Tennessee	44%	3158
Texas	44%	17492
Pennsylvania	44%	10592
Oklahoma	44%	1819
Mississippi	43%	1435
Kentucky	43%	2065
Ohio	43%	7813
Maryland	42%	3891
Maine	41%	1072
Virginia	41%	5887
Georgia	41%	5662
North Carolina	40%	5538
Nevada	40%	1646
Massachusetts	39%	5266
Montana	39%	204
Arizona	38%	3521
South Dakota	36%	283
Florida	36%	8817
Missouri	36%	3109
California	34%	23564
Utah	34%	1543
Washington	34%	3333
Alaska	33%	330
West Virginia	33%	542
Arkansas	32%	1133
Illinois	32%	5996
South Carolina	32%	1606
Delaware	30%	328
Hawaii	29%	364
New Mexico	29%	603
Louisiana	29%	1153
Washington DC	26%	167
New York	26%	6869
New Jersey	24%	3676

Nationally, an average of 42% of students spend more than 80% of their time in a regular classroom.



The application of the least restrictive environment

Why isn't every student in a regular education classroom?

There are many potential barriers to participation in a general education classroom. Symptoms and severity of the disability are considered when picking an educational environment, as is the ability of the environment to meet the educational, health and personal needs of the student. If the needs of the child place too great a demand on a teacher's time or resources over the rest of the students, a general education classroom may not be an appropriate environment, at least not without additional staff or resources. The requirement of direct and intense supports for learning

may also limit the ability of the student to participate in a general education classroom environment and learn effectively.

School and environmental factors also impact inclusion in general education classrooms. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are a great determinant of inclusion. Physical classroom and school barriers can effect inclusion, as can lack of funding for individual supports, workload of staff and lack of staff training, and programmatic and educational activities appropriate for students with disabilities.¹

Other educational environments

Where else can a student be placed?

Other environments reported on under IDEA include correctional facilities, homebound students or students in a hospital, students who have been parentally placed in private schools, students in residential facilities, and students who have been placed in separate schools for students with disabilities. The percent of students placed in a separate school varies by state, with some states reporting fewer than 1% of students in a separate school (including New Mexico, Louisiana, Oklahoma, West Virginia, Hawaii, Wyoming, and Iowa) and one reporting as many as 25% (New Jersey). The average is 6% across all states, and 41 states report fewer

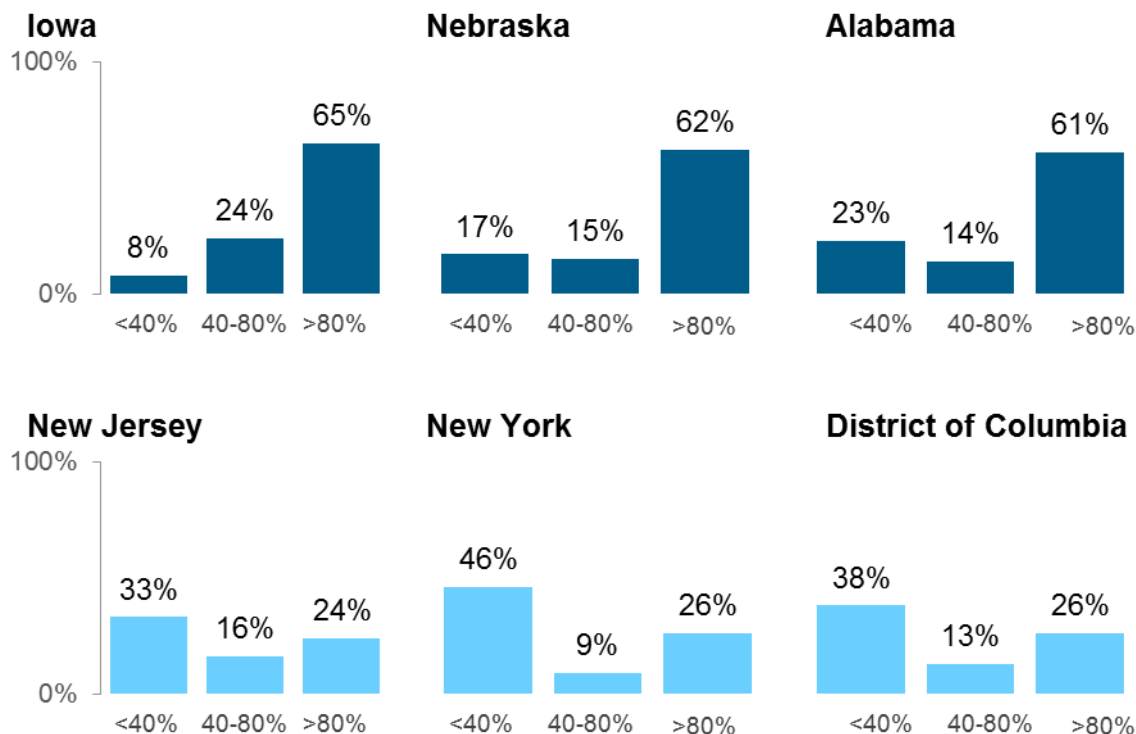
than 10% of students in separate schools.

On average, fewer than 1% of students are placed in a private school by their parents. The other categories are even less common.

Inclusion in a regular classroom is beneficial to both students with and students without disabilities. Students with disabilities are held to a higher standard of learning in a regular education classroom, and they learn social and communication skills from the classroom.² Students without disabilities learn about diversity, patience, self-esteem, and morality.³

State profiles: the highs and lows

Iowa, Nebraska, and Alabama had the most students in regular education classrooms more than 80% of the time. New Jersey, New York, and the District of Columbia had the fewest students in regular education classrooms more than 80% of the time..



Sources:

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The Life Course Outcomes Research Program is building a base of knowledge about the things other than clinical interventions that promote positive outcomes for people on the autism spectrum and their families and communities.