



State of Arizona
Department of Education

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Early Childhood Education Alert

ECSE 5

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To Early Childhood Special Education Administrators – Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and Continuum of Services for Preschoolers

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 04) and Federal Regulations require 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 not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services, that include alternative placements and make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement. In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, each public agency must ensure that the placement decision is made in conformity with these LRE provisions above. 20 USC §1412 (a) (5) and 34 CFR 300.114 – 120.

Each district should provide a continuum of services designed to provide for the individualized needs of each child. It is helpful to provide parents this information in the district's preschool parent handbook. The amount of time needed to meet the child's goals should be reflected in the child's Individual Education Program (IEP). In Arizona, when a district provides a preschool program, ARS R7-2-401 requires the provision of a minimum of 360 minutes of instruction in a program that operates at least three days a week in order for ADM to be claimed. Not every child may require 360 minutes per week of services in order to meet goals. The amount of instruction and related services a child needs to progress on goals should be determined by the IEP Team. The continuum of services may include consultation, itinerant, self-contained, inclusive (50% or more typically developing children), homebound, and/or special school.

There is a requirement to have a certified Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teacher servicing preschool children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). For children placed in regular education preschool programs (e.g. Head Start, child care center, community ed program, etc.), an itinerant ECSE teacher would function like any other itinerant professional. The ECSE teacher works with the ECE teacher and related service staff on materials needed, adaptations/modifications, and embedding specific interventions or direct instruction to the student. Related Service providers may also include consultation time on the IEP. Consultation time may also be reflected in the IEP. Service time should be based on how much intervention is necessary to have the child progressing on IEP goals.

Team planning time is an essential component of early childhood special education. Incorporating goals into the natural preschool environment, along with providing direct intervention when required takes planning. Inclusion (placing special needs children with typically developing children) without intensive intervention does not "fix" children in and of itself, but inclusive environments, when designed to meet the needs of all children, are powerful. Each child's needs should be assessed individually to determine the level of services necessary.