

IEP PLACEMENT TIPS FROM IDEA

Considering Harmful Effects of Restrictive Settings

*“In selecting the least restrictive environment, consideration is given to any **harmful effect** on the child or the quality of services that he or she needs.”*

IDEA Part B, Subpart B, Section 300.116 (d)

IDEA requires that, during the placement decision, IEP teams consider any harmful effect of the setting on the child and the quality of services. The following **potential harmful effects associated with more restrictive settings** (e.g., special class, special school) are provided to assist IEP teams with placement decisions. Corresponding research is listed on the following page.

Potential Harmful Effect on the Child in More Restrictive Settings

- Lower math and reading scores^{1, 2, 3}
- Lower literacy, math, and communication skill growth⁴
- Less growth in social skills^{2, 5, 6}
- Less participation in school and community groups⁵
- Fewer and less important social contacts⁷
- Lower rates of students prepared for post-secondary and career opportunities^{1, 8}
- Lower likelihood of gaining competitive employment and living independently⁵
- Higher likelihood of the use of restraints⁹

Potential Harmful Effect on the Quality of Services in More Restrictive Settings

- More distracting environments⁹
- Less access to age- and grade-appropriate learning materials¹⁰
- Less access to positive peer models for behavior, learning, and communication^{2, 10}
- Less access to peer support¹⁰
- Less access to general education teachers^{2, 4, 9, 10}
- Lower likelihood of achieving IEP goals⁴
- More instructional time from less qualified instructors (e.g., paraprofessional)^{2, 9}
- Greater likelihood of educator focusing on other adults rather than on students⁹
- Higher frequency of nonacademic instruction⁹
- Less student-centered instruction¹⁰

If someone claims potential harmful effects of more time in general education settings, **ask to see the research.**



Endnotes of research supporting claims of potential harmful effects:

1. Cole, S. M., Murphy, H. R., Frisby, M. B., & Robinson, J. (2023). The relationship between special education placement and high school outcomes. *The Journal of Special Education*, 57(1), 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669221097945>
2. Mansouri, M. C., Kurth, J. A., Lockman Turner, E., Zimmerman, K. N., & Frick, T. A. (2022). Comparison of academic and social outcomes of students with extensive support needs across placements. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(2), 111-129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221101792>
3. Cosier, M., Causton-Theoharis, J., & Theoharis, G. (2013). Does access matter? Time in general education and achievement for students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 34(6), 323-332. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932513485448>
4. Gee, K., Gonzalez, M., & Cooper, C. (2020). Outcomes of inclusive versus separate placements: A matched pairs comparison study. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 45(4), 223-240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796920943469>
5. Marder, C., Wagner, M., & Sumi, C. (2003). The social adjustment of youth with disabilities. *The Achievements of Youth With Disabilities During Secondary School: A Report From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*. SRI International. https://nlts2.sri.com/reports/2003_11/nlts2_report_2003_11_complete.pdf
6. Newman, L., & Davies-Mercier, E. (2005). The school engagement of elementary and middle school students with disabilities. *Engagement, Academics, Social Adjustment, and Independence: The Achievements of Elementary and Middle School Students With Disabilities*. SRI International. https://www.seels.net/designdocs/engagement/All_SEELS_outcomes_10-04-05.pdf
7. Jameson, J. M., Hicks, T., Lansey, K., Kurth, J. A., Jackson, L., Zagona, A. L., Burnette, K., Agran, M., Shogren, K., & Pace, J. (2022). Predicting the frequency and significance of social contacts across placements: A Bayesian multilevel model analysis. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(4), 229–243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221136538>
8. Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Kwiatek, S., Voggt, A., Chang, W.-H., Fowler, C. H., Poppen, M., Sinclair, J., & Test, D. W. (2021). Secondary transition predictors of postschool success: An update to the research base. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 44(1), 47-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420959793>
9. Zagona, A. L., Kurth, J. A., Lockman Turner, E., Pace, J., Shogren, K., Lansey, K., Jameson, M., Burnette, K., Mansouri, M., Hicks, T., & Gerasimova, D. (2022). Ecobehavioral analysis of the experiences of students with complex support needs in different classroom types. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(4), 209–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221126496>
10. Jackson, L., Agran, M., Lansey, K. R., Baker, D., Matthews, S., Fitzpatrick, H., Jameson, M., Ryndak, D., Burnette, K., & Taub, D. (2022). Examination of contextual variables across and within different types of placement for elementary students with complex support needs. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 47(4), 191-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969221132248>

Brief summaries of some of these studies are available on [E&E's Resource page](#).

