



# Supporting Students in Their Least Restrictive Environment

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*a brighter future for children with disabilities*

[www.tnstep.org](http://www.tnstep.org)

**Support and Training for Exceptional Parents, Inc. (STEP) is a statewide not-for-profit established in 1989 serving Tennessee families. We are Tennessee's PTI - Parent Training and Information Center.**

## **We serve families in Tennessee**

Families or caregivers in Tennessee with children and youth, birth to 26, with a diagnosed or suspected disability or special healthcare/ mental health need. STEP believes parents and caregivers are a child's best advocate.

## **We offer services to educators and the community**

- ★ High quality in-service and professional development
- ★ Parent workshops on special education topics
- ★ Youth activities

# Our Mission

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**STEP's Mission** is to serve families of children and youth, young adults, and those who are involved in their lives.

**We provide** accurate, timely, and relevant information and training related to special education rights, equal access to quality education, and connections to community resources.

**We believe** that parents and caregivers are their children's best advocates, and that youth disabilities should be self-advocates.

**We know** that families and youth who are informed, empowered, and engaged can effectively collaborate as part of a team for services and supports that will lead to improved outcomes and success in life.



# Focus of Today's Webinar

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- Critical Beliefs related to LRE**
- Transparency and Communication**
- Child Considerations related to LRE**
- Family Considerations related to LRE**
- Curriculum Consideration related to LRE**
- Classrooms are Ready for ALL Students**
- Thoughts to Ponder**
- Benefits of Inclusion**

# *Dear Colleague Letter*

- “The least restrictive environment (LRE) requirements in section 612(a)(5) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA or Act) are fully applicable to the placement of preschool children with disabilities”
- “These requirements reflect the IDEA’s strong preference for educating students with disabilities in regular classes with appropriate aids and supports”
- <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/preschool-lre-dcl-1-10-17.pdf>

# Critical Beliefs

Special Education is  
**NOT** a place

It **IS** supports  
and services brought  
to students  
through an **IEP**



## All students

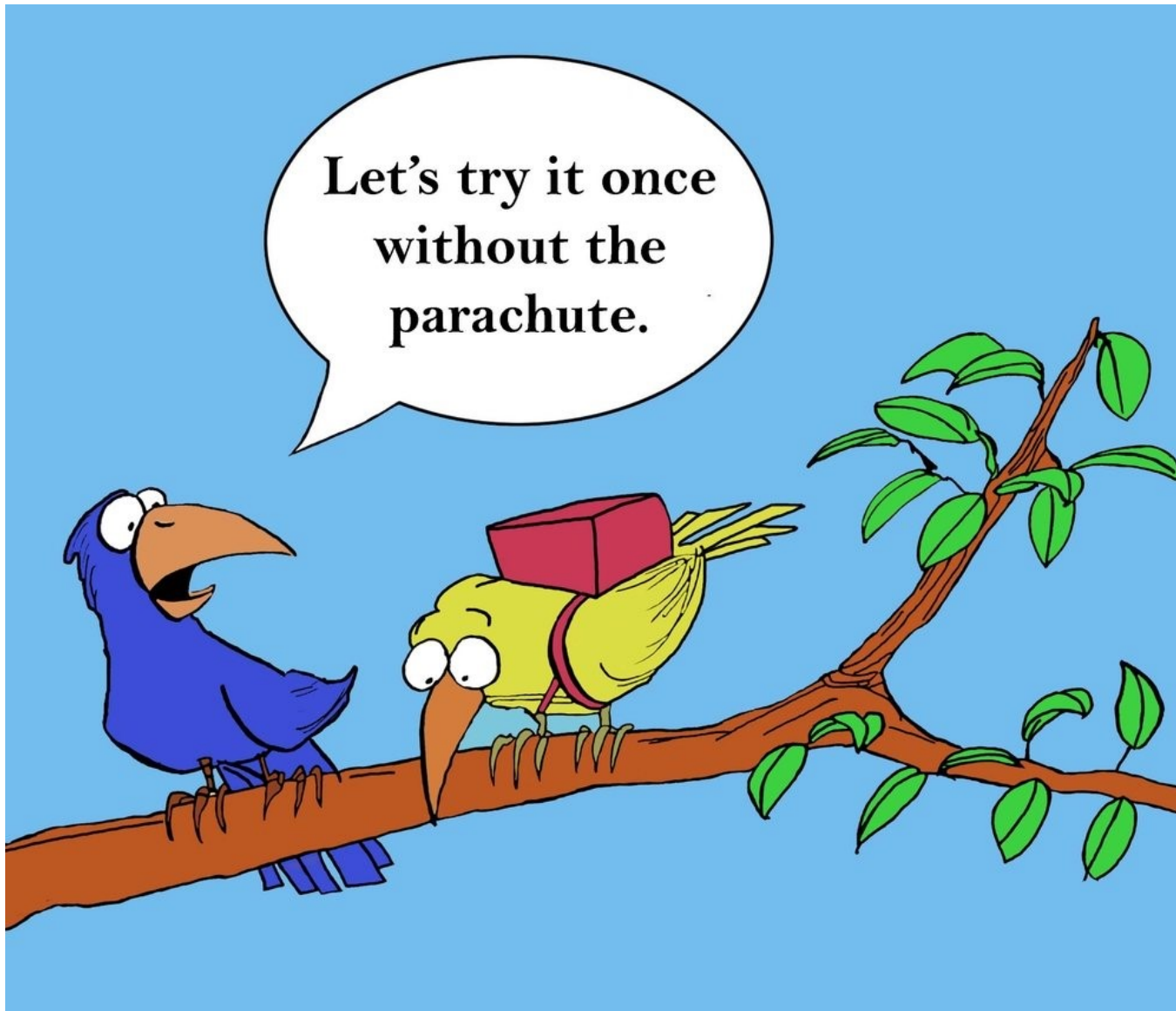
- can think and learn
- have value and unique gifts to offer their school
- differ in the ways they most effectively learn and express their understandings

## All students learn best when

- they are actively and collaboratively building knowledge with their classmates and their teacher
- studying interesting and challenging topics that they find personally meaningful

**Diversity within a school  
community should be valued**

# What Makes You Anxious?



# My Journey: Possibly a Little Anxiety





# Common Thoughts From Educators

Too much 1 on 1  
needed

I don't have a  
special education  
degree

Other children  
won't think it is  
"fair"

Children without  
disabilities won't  
make progress

Children with  
disabilities have  
more challenging  
behaviors

Inclusion doesn't  
make much  
difference

# Common Thoughts From Families

Will my child be safer?

I'm worried they will be bullied

My child needs one-on-one assistance

My child is too far behind academically to master all the grade level content

My child is not able to communicate

My child needs to learn daily living skills

# Common Thoughts From Educators

Children without disabilities also have a wide variety of needs that teachers address every day. IDEA provides for supports.



Too much  
1 on 1 needed

The developmentally appropriate activities and teaching strategies you already use will work for children with disabilities too



I don't have a  
special education  
degree

High quality classrooms and good teaching **already** include differentiation, modifications, and accommodations based on need



Other children  
won't think it  
is "fair"

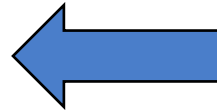


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CONSIDERING HER STUDENTS WITHOUT  
DISABILITIES, MRS. BAKER  
REALIZES DAVID'S UNUSUAL  
BEHAVIORS AREN'T THAT UNUSUAL.

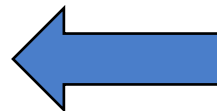
# Common Thoughts From Educators

In inclusive classrooms typical students develop equal or greater cognitive and language skills, PLUS advance socially



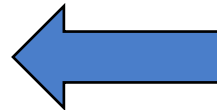
Children without disabilities won't make progress

Challenging behaviors are not exclusive to children with disabilities and behavior management can help all



Children with disabilities have more challenging behaviors

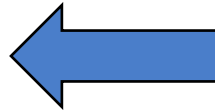
Being in an inclusive setting in preschool influences trajectory of future placements and life outcomes for children



Inclusion doesn't make much difference

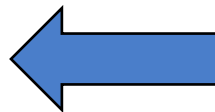
# Common Thoughts From Families

Developing friendships that carry across the school career will ensure there are plenty of “champions” to speak up



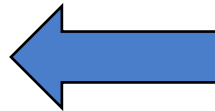
Will my child be safe?

Students can be bullied in any setting. This is an issue to address as systems change to ensure safety for all kids



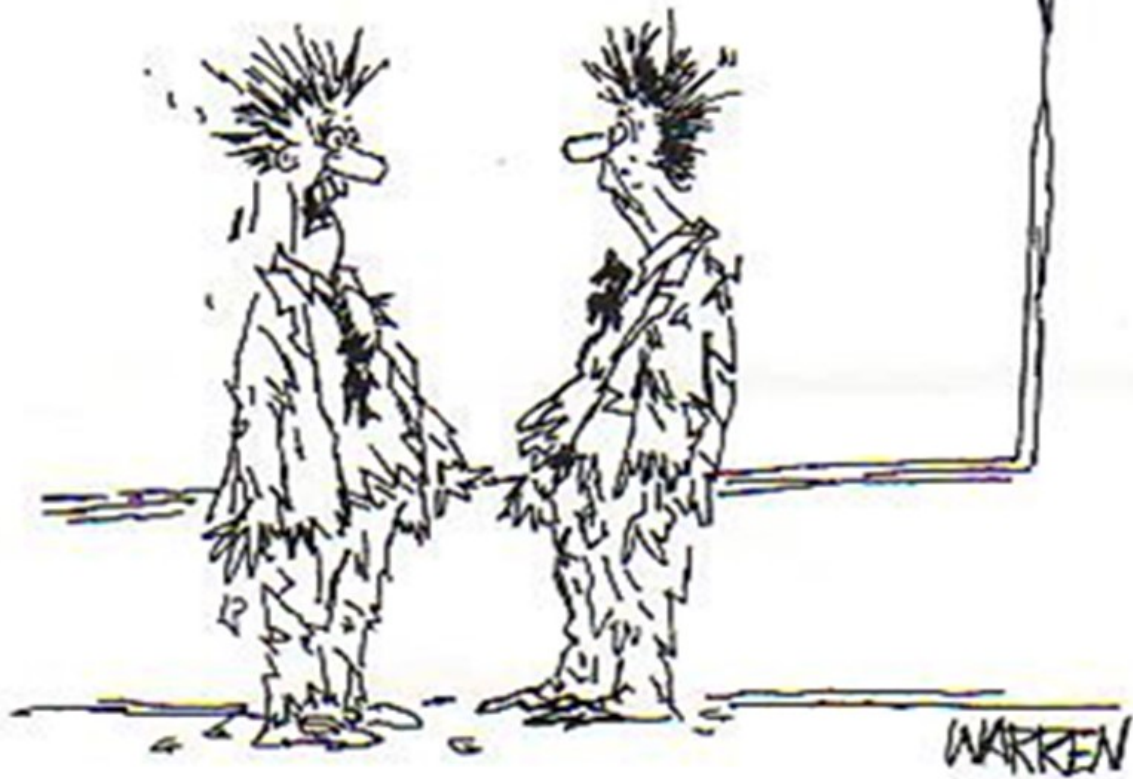
I’m worried my child will be bullied

Children without disabilities also have a wide variety of needs that teachers address every day. IDEA provides for supports, including additional personnel



My child needs one-on-one assistance

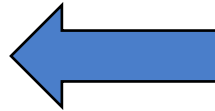
# PARENT-TEACHER NIGHT



"You must be Timmy's dad. I'm Timmy's teacher."

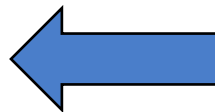
# Common Thoughts From Families

There is no requirement that a student master all the content in a particular grade or class. The team can define what equals measurable progress.



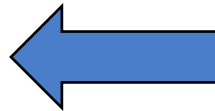
My child is too far behind academically to master all the grade level content

Inclusion is not a choice between functional skills and academics. Students with disabilities can work on anything to help them prepare for life after high school



My child needs to learn daily living skills

Various forms of communication can be put into place throughout the school day to ensure your child has a voice



My child is not able to communicate



In Other Words...

*You got this!*  
*Just take a deep breath.*

# Special Education Continuum of Services

## General Ed Classroom

- Consultation
- Information Sharing
- Problem Solving
- Co-teaching
- Collaboration
- Coaching
- Co-teaching
- Other support services

## Pull Out Services/Supports

- Direct Instruction
- Academic Support
- Social Skills
- Study Strategies
- Transition Skills

## Separate Classroom

- Direct Instruction
- Behavior Instruction
- Social Skills
- Content Instruction
- Functional Skills

## Alternative Setting

- Special Schools
- Home Instruction
- Hospitals
- Specialized Institutions

**Least Restrictive**

**Most Restrictive**

# Meet Avery

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**Avery** was diagnosed as having Down syndrome shortly after her birth. She received early intervention services as an infant and toddler. She experienced no serious physical complications as a result of having Down syndrome, however, she had frequent ear infections and had tubes placed in her ears as a toddler.

Just before turning three years old, a meeting was held to develop her initial IEP. The team discussed that Avery has a significant developmental delay in all areas with the most pronounced delays in receptive and expressive communication. Through the SLP working with her in early intervention, the team was informed that a total communication approach was used for Avery, working with spoken words, manual signs, and gestures to communicate. Avery rarely uses words or signs to communicate spontaneously, and she is difficult to understand. With models and prompts, she can say or sign approximations of 25 words. Her parents want Avery to improve comprehension and also make herself understood.

Avery shows an awareness and interest in other children, as reported by her parents. She mostly plays alone, and less often she will engage in parallel play when in a group setting. Currently, she seems to prefer adult attention rather than that of her peers. Avery loves to look at books and responds well to music and puppets. She has a great interest in Disney characters, especially the princesses. Avery's parents want her to join in play with other children and participate in the preschool classroom routines.

Though she can walk, Avery sometimes prefers to crawl around the floor. Her mom describes her as a “fearless climber” yet she does not seem aware of the possible dangers of climbing and may let go when climbing structures. She has problems with balance and cannot yet throw or catch a ball. Her parents want her to increase her mobility and use preschool classroom materials such as crayons, pencils, paints, and scissors.

Avery does not yet sign or say when she needs to use the toilet. She does not dress herself or wash her hands independently. When she does not want to do something or does not understand what has been asked of her, Avery will “go limp.” Some of her providers in early intervention have described her as “very stubborn” and sometimes non-compliant. She cannot always follow simple directions. Her parents want Avery to take care of her toileting needs, dressing, and hand-washing independently.

# Considerations for all Children

**Children do not have to meet any defined expectations to be *ready* for inclusion.**

**Instead programs should be prepared to include all children.**

**LRE** Good communication about expectations

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Shared philosophy on benefits of inclusion

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Adequate planning time for staff

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Joint participation in program development

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Administrative support

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# Guiding Questions for LRE Decisions

- 1. What services and supports would the child need to be successful?**
- 2. Can the IEP be implemented in the regular program with appropriate supports?**
3. What regular early childhood programs are in the school district and community?
4. Will the regular early childhood program support the collaboration and specialized instruction for the child?



# Guiding Questions for LRE Decisions

5. Will transitions for the child be reduced or increased in this setting?
6. Will time in transport to the setting be similar to transport time for children without disabilities?
7. Will parents have children in different schools?
8. **What are the benefits for the child?**
9. **What input does the family have?**



Adapted from an Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center presentation by Debbie Cate, Kathy Whaley, and Megan Vinh, "Making IEP Team Placement Decisions: It's a Process!", May 7, 2018, National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute



# Guiding Questions for LRE Decisions

10. Does the family prefer supports and services provided in the everyday activities and routines in the home? Is home an appropriate place to implement the IEP?
11. Are there other placements that may be best for this child, and why? Should multiple placement options be considered for the student's day?
12. Will the family be able to visit the setting before agreeing to the proposed placement?
13. Does the team, which includes the family, agree an early childhood placement is the best option?

# Child Considerations – Getting to Know the Child

- All About Me
  - Personal information
  - Special equipment and supplies
  - Things that make me happy
  - When I'm not so happy
  - Allergies, medications
  - Special services
  - Important people in my life, important phone numbers



# Child Considerations – Guiding Questions

- What are the child's developmental strengths and abilities?
- Where is the child now?
- Has the child experienced success in his/her previous placements?
- Has the child experienced challenges?
- Is the child in a location with children his or her age with typically developing children?
- What behavior/skills are developmentally appropriate for this child?
- Does the child have any specific behavioral concerns?

# Family Considerations – Guiding Questions

- Does the family have some IEP goal areas that they want to include? Are there home routines and activities that the child needs assistance that could also be addressed through the school day?
- Are there areas of concern in which the family might need assistance and training to help to support the implementation of the IEP?
- What opportunities has the child had to interact with typically developing peers that the family felt was important? (e.g. faith based programs, community programs, etc.)

# Curricular Considerations – Guiding Questions

- Can the child experience success in the same activities as his/her peers?
- Can the child participate in the same activities with modifications?
- What are the identified IEP goals and objectives for the child?
- Can the IEP goals and objectives be embedded in the classroom instruction and activities?

# Curricular Considerations - Embedded Learning Opportunities

Curriculum Modifications – used to help a child participate

Environmental support

Materials adaptation

Activity simplification

Child preferences

Special equipment

Adult support

Peer support

Invisible support

***“Classrooms need to  
be **READY** for **ALL**  
students”***

# Increasing Inclusive Opportunities

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## OUTCOME

Inclusion is the first option considered for every student

STRATEGIES  
TO CONSIDER



# Strategies to Consider

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- All classrooms use principles of UDL
- All students choose methods that work for them
- All families are provided information on the benefits of inclusion

# Increasing Inclusive Opportunities

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## OUTCOME

All families KNOW they are  
an essential part of  
education decision making

STRATEGIES  
TO CONSIDER

# Strategies to Consider

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- Every family is provided tools to share their child's strengths and needs with the teacher.
  - ALL ABOUT ME BOOK
  - ONE PAGE PROFILES
  - Dream Building Activity Sets
- All teachers Learn 3 characteristics about EVERY child in their classroom
  - Readiness Level – current skills and understanding of the topic
  - Interest Level – tasks that ignite individualized student curiosity and passion
  - Learning and Expression Profile – the preferred learning style and ways to express what they know and can do

**Inclusive  
Opportunities**



**Effective  
Instruction  
and  
Engagement**

# Addressing “It’s Not Fair”

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- **What if all the kids want it?**
  - Provide access to modifications during other times of the day.
- **Is it fair?**
  - Yes. You can present a modification as something that will “help” a child be able to do something that another child already knows. Keep in mind that you are “individualizing,” not giving a special prize to a child. You can say, “You already know how to do this! She is still learning, and this ball helps her learn.”
- **What if it becomes distracting?**
  - Typically the child’s non-participation is already distracting and taking a teacher away from the rest of the group. If the modification works, it will work fast. After the child has learned how to use it, greater independence in this area will be achieved.

***“Every skill can be taught in multiple settings”***

# Benefits of inclusion

- Friendships
- Increased appreciation and acceptance of individual differences
- Increased understanding and acceptance of diversity
- Prepares all students for adult life in an inclusive society
- Opportunities to master activities by practicing and teaching others
- Increased self-esteem, confidence, autonomy and leadership skills



***“Will someone miss  
me if I don’t come  
today?”***



***“What will it take to  
include \_\_\_\_\_”***

# Informing Vs. Engaging



## Surrounded By Water

# Sensitivity to Family Dynamics



**Karen Harrison with husband, Jim;  
daughter, Sarah; and "Snowman"**

# Inclusion Changes Lives



# Lifelong Impact of Inclusion



# Lifelong Impact of Inclusion



# An Individualized Approach for Each Student

