

**CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
HARTFORD**

**SERIES: 2002-2003  
CIRCULAR LETTER: C-28**

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi  
Commissioner of Education

DATE: April 2, 2003

SUBJECT: LRE for Students, Ages 3-5, with Disabilities

The purpose of this letter is to clarify the requirements of the least restrictive environment for 3- and 4- year old children as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). Enclosed with this Circular Letter is a Data Bulletin that provides information about children with disabilities ages three through five years of age (See enclosure #1). The Data Bulletin also provides information on the current educational placements and time with non-disabled peers. The Department anticipates that children with disabilities will be provided with increasing meaningful opportunities to be educated with children who are not disabled and that data reflecting this activity will be clearly evident.

The IDEA '97 amendments clarify that the federal requirements apply to all eligible preschool and kindergarten-age children with disabilities. An eligible 3- or 4-year-old child with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), as is the school-aged child with a disability. This includes the requirement that each child is to be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children who are not disabled and that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the child's disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids or services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. The Connecticut State Board of Education has incorporated this requirement in its Position Statement on "Educating Students with Disabilities", adopted January 3, 2001 (see enclosure #2). The full continuum of alternative placements identified at 34 CFR 300.551 must be available to preschool children with disabilities. The continuum requirement must include the alternative placements listed in the IDEA. (See enclosure #3 on federal definitions for Preschool Placements).

There are a number of examples of meeting the IDEA's LRE requirement as it applies to preschool and kindergarten children eligible for special education. Such examples can include but are not limited to: tuitioning a child into a public or private regular education early childhood program; placing classes for preschool children in the child's home school or other elementary

school buildings in the district to build capacity for regular preschool class placements; providing integrated (e.g., reverse mainstream) settings; or providing itinerant services to children at sites that children without disabilities are attending.

Itinerant services are special education and related services delivered to children, individually or in a small group, for no more than 3 hours per week (US Department of Education) within a variety of possible locations. Itinerant services can provide an LRE for a preschool-age child. Such itinerant services provide the supplementary special education and related services required by an individual child while allowing the child to participate in any activity or activities that children without disabilities would participate in before the age of compulsory school education.

In addition to itinerant services indicated above, Planning and Placement Teams identify a number of 3- and 4-year-old children who require a 'program' in order to meet their individual needs. In such cases, where a program is recommended, the PPT must first consider an early childhood setting or reverse mainstream (integrated) setting, both which provide the opportunity for time with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate before considering other placement options. The overriding requirement in meeting the provision of LRE is that placement decisions for all students with disabilities, including preschool students, must be made on an individual basis. Challenges with space, staffing, resources, time, travel, transportation, and other such factors are not sufficient justification for denying an opportunity for time with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. A unified and coordinated continuum of educational placements and opportunities designed to address the needs of young children with disabilities must be provided by the LEA. To ensure that a range of placement opportunities is available, LEAs should collaborate with community-based preschool providers around their participation in student IEPs and consider increasing school-based preschool options into which children with special needs or disabilities will receive services.

Consistent with the State Department of Education's emphasis on early childhood, it is expected that all eligible 3- and 4-year-old children with disabilities will have equal access to and will be afforded opportunities to have a high-quality preschool experience such that they will be ready to enter school at age five prepared to succeed.

For further information, please contact Mr. George Dowaliby, Bureau Chief, Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services at (860) 807-2025 or via e-mail at [george.dowaliby@po.state.ct.us](mailto:george.dowaliby@po.state.ct.us) or Maria Synodi at (860) 807-2054 or via e-mail at [maria.synodi@po.state.ct.us](mailto:maria.synodi@po.state.ct.us).

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Enclosures

Cc: Directors of Special Education