

Residential Placement for School

By Mary E. Levis, M.A., N.C.S.P., CdLS Foundation Professional Development Committee

Children in the United States are entitled to a public school education at no cost to them or their family. As a parent of a child with a disability, it is most important to work collegially with the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team at your child's school. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provide that students with disabilities are delivered a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Disagreement between what is "appropriate" is often the root for disagreement between parents and school systems.

First, look to your child's IEP to see if measureable progress has been made on their annual goals and benchmark objectives. If minimal progress or no progress has been made on some or all of their goals, it is the IEP team's responsibility to meet and discuss needed changes to the IEP. What additional supports, instruction, accommodations, modifications, change in LRE, etc., may be needed to ensure that your child receives FAPE and makes academic, functional, and behavioral gains that are reasonable and measureable? Decisions to change a student's IEP to a more restrictive placement must be data driven.

If an IEP is formulated that requires a more restrictive placement, such as a separate day program within a private school (Private Separate Day) or a full time special education program within a private residential setting (Private Residential Facility), it is the local school system's responsibility to pay for that educational placement as well as the required transportation. The local school system (LSS) is the school system where your child currently attends school. Sometimes, if there are other agencies involved with your child, they may share some of the costs of placement, however, the LSS is required to pick up the educational costs incurred in such a placement if they cannot meet your child's needs in their system. With regard to transportation, sometimes school systems will provide transportation or some have reimbursed families who transport their children for their travel expenses.

This makes it sound like a straightforward process that will occur when and if your child has needs that are more than what their school can provide. Unfortunately, it doesn't always go that way. The following are some suggestions on how to best advocate for your child so they are provided with an appropriate education:

- Make sure that you carefully review the goals and objectives on their IEP. You want to be sure that the goals are measureable, as well as the objectives that document progress to each of their goals. The data supports the decision-making.
- Be aware of the differences between related services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech therapy, etc., that are provided in the educational setting



versus those that are provided in a clinical setting. In school, these related services are to facilitate educational performance. They are not habilitative or rehabilitative.

- Research other educational facilities, programs, and resources in your area. Many school systems have a parent resource center as part of their system, which can offer a variety of support services, including things such as advocacy, providing information on other educational programs, and family support groups.

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