



**TO:** AEA Directors of Special Education  
School District Superintendents  
**FR:** Lana Michelson  
**DA:** December 1, 2006  
**RE:** Consultative Teaching, Co-Teaching, and Least Restrictive Environment  
Problems of Implementation

PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL.

The Department has been made aware of certain misunderstandings and some instances of improper implementation of the IDEA's least restrictive environment (LRE) mandate and its "highly qualified teacher" (HQT) quality mandate. Some of those misunderstandings and resulting implementation difficulties are presented on the second page, accompanied by guidance and further information. It would appear that there is some confusion about what the LRE and HQT mandates actually require. Schools are to comply with both mandates: there is no either/or choice involved.

Concerning LRE, it is presumed that all children will be educated in the general education environment; however, each placement must be made based on each child's individual needs. For a small number of children, the general education environment, even with support and related services, is inappropriate. For all children, the least restrictive environment for each child is determined based on the unique needs of each child.

Concerning HQT, the IDEA requires that each secondary school teacher in a core content area must be "highly qualified." The HQT requirement, however, does not alter the requirement that children with disabilities receive specially designed instruction or eliminate the crucial role of the special educator. The general educator is an expert on content, and the special educator is the expert on identifying instructional strategies that provide children with special education needs access to the general education curriculum. These areas of expertise are to be blended using consultative teaching and/or co-teaching. Co-teaching occurs when both a general educator and a special educator are physically present and contributing to the instruction in a classroom. The Consultative Model occurs when the general educator provides content instruction and the special educator has consulted with the general education teacher on individual needs, student assessment, progress monitoring, and other IEP (Individual Education Program) needs.

This memorandum covers major issues and concerns, and gives general information. For more specific information or technical assistance, feel free to contact Norma Lynch ([Norma.Lynch@iowa.gov](mailto:Norma.Lynch@iowa.gov) or 515-281-6038) or Kara Krohn ([Kara.Krohn@iowa.gov](mailto:Kara.Krohn@iowa.gov) or 515-281-7145).

Scenario 1: A district unilaterally places a child with disabilities in the general education environment using either consultative teaching and/or co-teaching. This is done without giving notice to the parents or convening an IEP team meeting.

ANALYSIS: The district's action would appear to result in a change in a child's IEP or the child's placement, for which the district must give prior written notice to the parents, who are entitled to procedural safeguards.

Scenario 2: A district tells parents and educators that all children must be in the general education classroom. The district uses LRE or HQT as a rationale. The district states, "There is no more special education in the building." It appears in this scenario that children with disabilities receive no specially designed instruction or supports and related services in the general education environment.

ANALYSIS: There must be a continuum of services to meet the needs of students with disabilities, including students who cannot be educated in the general education environment even with support and related services. The IDEA states each student with a disability must be educated "to the maximum extent appropriate" in the general education environment, based on each student's needs. Furthermore, each eligible child is entitled to "specially designed instruction" appropriate to that child's needs. For students in the general education environment, this may require consultative or co-teaching. Finally, some students require support and related services for placement in the general education environment.

Scenario 3: Special educators and general educators who are partners in collaborative (consultative or co-teaching) never have contact or have insufficient common planning time to discuss content, instructional strategies, and other supports for students with special education needs.

ANALYSIS: Special educators and general educators who are engaged in collaborative teaching must have "regular and frequent" consultation, which means that both the core content teacher and the special education teacher are thoroughly familiar with the core content teaching strategies used in the classroom, individual specially designed instruction, progress of students in the general education curriculum, classroom assessments, individual assessments, and individual accommodations. The consultation may take place through professional development opportunities, staff meetings, regularly scheduled consultation, e-mail and telephone consultation, and other means.

Scenario 4: An educator recognizes she or he needs more training and support to engage in consultative teaching and/or co-teaching.

ANALYSIS: If additional resources to engage in collaborative teaching are needed, please contact local school leaders. For additional training or professional development, each AEA has staff who have received training on Iowa's Consultative Model for Collaborative Services Provision, which included both consultative and co-teaching. Feel free to contact the AEA professional development office for further training.