ARIZONA DS Network
ENRICHMENT CENTER ★ Down Syndrome Knowledge, Support & Advocacy

Champions for Kids

Inclusion

a.k.a. Least Restrictive Environment

Karla Phillips-Krivickas
Dr. Leila Williams
November 5, 2026

Why Is Inclusion Important?

1. Prepares Children for the Real World
2. Promotes Empathy and Emotional Intelligence
3. High Expectations for All Students
4. Builds Stronger Peer Relationships
5. Individualized Support for All
6. Fosters a Sense of Belonging

https://www.includenj.org/resources/6-reasons-why-inclusive-education-is-the-best-choice-for-your-child

It's the Law?
Least Restrictive Environment

(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and
(ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [§300.114(a]

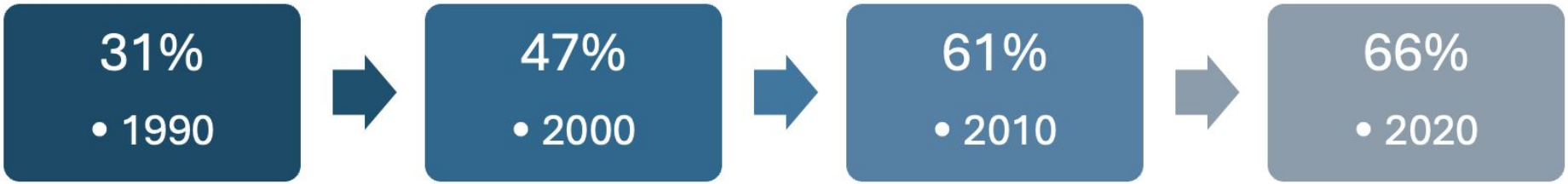
How Do We Measure It?

Individually, LRE is measured on IEPs as follows:

- Level A: Inside the regular classroom 80% or more of the day.
- Level B: Inside the regular classroom between 79% and 40% of the day.
- Level C: Inside the regular classroom less than 40% of the day.
- Level D: In separate schools, residential facilities, or home-bound/hospital placements.

Great Improvement Over Time

Annual reports to Congress on the implementation of IDEA show decades of growth for inclusive education. The percentage of students who spend the majority of their day (over 80% of the day) has doubled since 1990.



How Does Arizona Measure Up?

State Rankings

Nationally, **Arizona ranks 26th** for inclusion, with **69%** of its students with disabilities spending over 80% of their day in a regular classroom.

National Comparison

#1 Alabama 83%

#26 Arizona 69%

#50 New Jersey 44%

How Is Your School District Doing?

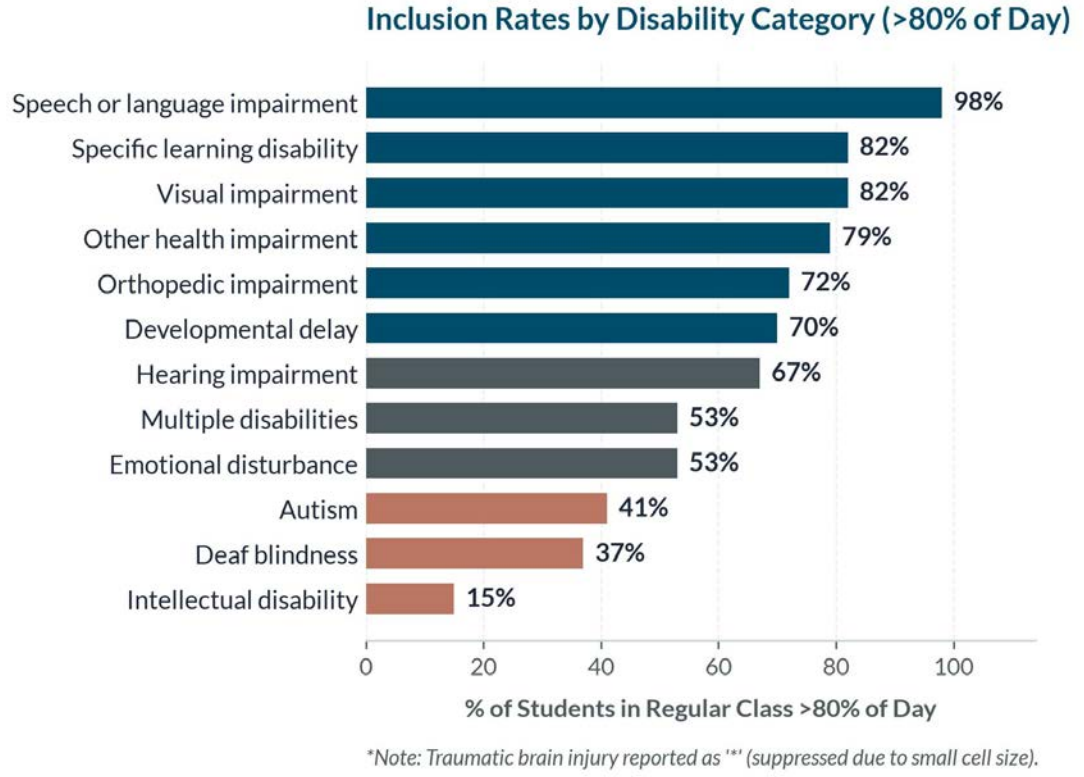
Inclusion in Arizona varies by district and charter school. The LRE of each is reported to the federal government and posted publicly.

Lookup Your District

Select **Indicator 5** on the ADE performance portal to view district data.

Note: Spots with '' indicate too few students to publicly report.

Inclusion Rates Vary Widely Across Disabilities



98%

Speech & Language

Enjoys near-universal full inclusion (98%), followed by learning and visual impairments at 82%.

15%

Intellectual Disability

Most placed in self-contained classrooms with only 15% in general education classes. Autism (41%) and deaf-blindness (37%) also trail sharply.

Resources

https://www.parentcenterhub.org/placement-lre/#core

National Down Syndrome Society - Inclusive Education Guidelines - https://ndss.org/inclusive-education-guidelines

National Down Syndrome Congress - Inclusive Education Resources - https://ndsccenter.org/file_download/inline/717ebd38-15e7-4f39-8a4f-02ce92c48d36

The TIES Center - https://tiescenter.org/about/overview

Arizona Department of Education - Academic Achievement and Inclusive Practices - https://www.azed.gov/specialeducation/academic-achievement-and-inclusive-practices



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Questions for Leila

Leila - how long were you the special education director at Sunnyside? Down in Tucson right? How many schools are there? How many students?

Is it fair to say that the district did not have a culture of inclusion when you arrived?

I'm guessing there were a lot of issues going on at the same time why did you decide to tackle placements?

Did you have the support of your administration? staff?

Were parents excited?

So break it down for us - how did you approach this? How long did it take?

How were things working when you left?

Elementary - middle and high school - each is very different and gradually harder

The pitfalls of an aide

My advice

Give them permission to be hard on her

Describe the ‘island dilemma”

Don’t focus on ‘inclusion’ but rather the goals

Inclusion is way more than the IEP

Build an inclusion resume

Alot of services means alot of pullout

Elementary - middle and high school - each is very different and gradually harder

Developmental preschool is Hotel California

The pitfalls of an aide

Leila

How long were you at Sunnyside? Describe the process where you decide to try and dismantle the self-contained programs. Did you have support from admin?

How did parents react?

How hard was it? What was the hardest part? What surprised you?

Numbers before and after

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