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## IBO Releases Study on Efforts to Educate Students in the Least Restrictive Environment

**April 11, 2024**, – Today, the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO) is publishing its report *“The Inflexibility of Special Education Recommendations: An Examination of Efforts to Educate Students in the Least Restrictive Environment.”*

This report is a mixed-method study which investigated the extent to which elementary students with disabilities were being recommended for more inclusive settings with their peers without disabilities in the New York City public school system. This study draws from qualitative data collected at 30 school team meetings during the 2017–2018 school year and from quantitative data on all elementary school students from 2014-2015 through 2016-2017, with additional analysis through 2018-2019.

A brief summarizing the findings of the [study can be found here](#) and the full [study can be found here](#).

- In 2016-2017, 70 percent of students with IEPs were most frequently recommended for less restrictive settings (general education classrooms with services and integrated co-teaching classrooms), while 30 percent were most frequently recommended for the most restrictive setting (self-contained classrooms). Students recommended for self-contained classrooms were more likely to have disability classifications associated with behavioral challenges.
- During the length of this study, While the DOE had encouraged flexible programming that spans programs and levels of restrictiveness, over 95 percent of students in the sample were recommended to be served in only one program.
- Student-level factors associated with being recommended to move into a more restrictive environment include prior year suspension, prior year disability classification, and English Language Learner status. At the school level, the availability of a self-contained classroom posed the greatest effect, which was larger than the effect of the availability of an integrated co-teaching classroom.
- Behavioral issues dominated the focus of meetings that discussed students with IEPs (School Implementation Team, or SIT, meetings), despite more students being initially identified for academic reasons. In the meetings, staff across schools voiced concern over the limited number of strategies to address students’ behavioral needs or mitigate classroom disturbances.

- Setting availability was a major focus of SIT discussions despite DOE’s guidance to the contrary—for recommendations to not be limited by the availability of a program or service at the school level. Across schools, teams did not typically discuss less restrictive environments for their students identified with behavioral challenges. School teams did not express confidence in the efficacy of supports that could be provided to students with behavioral challenges in more general education and more inclusive settings, and as a result, self-contained classrooms were often the first and only setting discussed in the meetings observed.



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