



The Difference between IEPs and 504 Plans

(Adapted from <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/the-difference-between-ieps-and-504-plans>)

	Individualized Education Plan (IEP)	504 Plan
Basic description	A blueprint or plan for a child’s special education experience at school.	A blueprint or plan for how the school will provide support and remove barriers for a student with a disability.
What it does	Provides FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) through individualized special education and related services to meet a child’s unique needs in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). These services are provided at no cost to families.	Provides FAPE through services and accommodations to enable students to learn alongside their peers in the LRE. As with an IEP, a 504 plan is provided at no cost to families.
What law applies?	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): This is a federal special education law for children with disabilities.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: This is a federal civil rights law to stop discrimination against people with disabilities.
Who’s eligible?	To get an IEP, there are three requirements: 1. A child has one or more of the 13 disabilities listed in IDEA. The law lists specific challenges, like learning disabilities, ADHD, autism, and others. 2. The disability must affect the child’s educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum. 3. The child must need specialized instruction to make progress in school.	A 504 Accommodations Plan provides equal access to a school’s programs. There are two requirements: (1) a child must have a documented disability and (2) there are barriers to the student having equal access to their Free Appropriate Public Education. Section 504 has a broader definition of a disability than IDEA. (The disability must substantially limit one or more basic life activities. This can include learning, reading, communicating, and thinking.) A child might not require specialized instruction but still needs accommodations to access his education via a 504 plan.
Independent Educational Evaluation	If a family disagrees with the evaluative data being used by the district, a family can ask the school district to pay for an independent educational evaluation (IEE) by an outside expert. The district doesn’t have to agree. Families can always pay for an outside evaluation themselves, but the district is only required to consider and not necessarily implement it.	Doesn’t allow families to ask for an IEE. As with an IEP evaluation, families can always pay for an outside evaluation themselves.
Who creates it?	There are strict legal requirements about who participates. With a few exceptions, the entire IEP team must be present for IEP meetings. The team must include:	The rules about who’s on the 504 team are less specific than they are for an IEP. A 504 plan is created by a team of people who are familiar with the child and



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The child’s parent or caregiver <input type="checkbox"/> At least one of the child’s general education teachers <input type="checkbox"/> At least one special education teacher <input type="checkbox"/> A district representative (LEA) with authority over special education services <input type="checkbox"/> As needed, a school psychologist or other specialist who can interpret evaluation results. 	<p>who understand the evaluation data and special services options. This might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The school or district’s 504 Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> The child’s parent or caregiver <input type="checkbox"/> General and special education teachers <input type="checkbox"/> The school principal
What’s in it?	<p>The IEP sets learning goals and describes the services the school will provide. It’s a written document. Here are some of the most important things the IEP must include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The child’s present levels of academic and functional performance – how the child is currently doing in school. <input type="checkbox"/> Annual education goals for the child and how the school will track progress. <input type="checkbox"/> The services the child will get – this may include special education, related, supplementary, and extended school year services. <input type="checkbox"/> The timing of services – when they start, how often they occur, and how long they last. <input type="checkbox"/> Any accommodations – changes to the child’s learning environment <input type="checkbox"/> Any modifications – changes to what the child is expected to learn or know. <input type="checkbox"/> How the child will participate in standardized tests <input type="checkbox"/> How the child will be included in general education classes and school activities 	<p>There is no standard 504 plan. Unlike an IEP, a 504 plan doesn’t <i>have</i> to be a written document. A 504 plan generally includes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Specific accommodations, supports, or services to ensure the student can access their FAPE. For example, this may include speech therapy, technology, counseling, or modifications to the learning environment. <input type="checkbox"/> Name of the person responsible for ensuring the plan is implemented
Notice	<p>When the school wants to change a child’s services or placement, it has to tell families in writing <i>before</i> the change. This is called prior written notice. Notice is also required for any IEP meetings and evaluations.</p>	<p>The school must notify families about an evaluation or a “significant change” in placement. The notice doesn’t have to be in writing, but most schools do so anyway.</p>



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Consent	A parent or guardian must consent in writing for the school to evaluate a child . They must also consent in writing before the school can provide the services in an IEP .	A parent or guardian's consent is required for the school district to evaluate a child .
How often it's reviewed and revised	The IEP team must review the IEP at least once a year. The child must be reevaluated every three years to determine whether services are still needed.	The rules vary by state. Generally, a 504 plan is reviewed each year and a reevaluation is done every three years or when needed.
How to resolve disputes	IDEA gives families several ways to resolve disputes (usually in this order): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation <input type="checkbox"/> Due process complaint <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution session <input type="checkbox"/> Due Process Hearing <input type="checkbox"/> State complaint 	Section 504 gives families several options for resolving disagreements with the school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Each District must have a Section 504 Grievance Procedure. This varies from district to district. <input type="checkbox"/> Impartial Hearing <input type="checkbox"/> Complaint to the Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
Funding/costs	Students receive these services at no charge. States receive additional funding for students with IEPs.	Students receive these services at no charge. States do NOT receive extra funding for students with 504 plans. But the federal government can take funding away from programs (including schools) that don't meet their legal duty to serve students with disabilities. IDEA funds can't be used to serve students with 504 plans.