

The difference between IEPs and 504 plans

Both IEPs and 504 plans offer formal help for K–12 students who are struggling in school. They're similar in some ways but different in others — from who can get them to what they include. Learn more about the key differences.

IEPs and **504 plans** are both designed to support students with learning challenges. But they work in different ways. This comparison chart shows the differences.

	IEP	504 plan
What it is	A written plan that provides free special education services, related services, and supports to meet a child's unique needs. That includes specialized instruction.	A plan for how the school will provide free supports and remove barriers so a student can learn alongside peers.
What law applies	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): This is a federal special education law for kids with disabilities.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: This is a federal civil rights law to stop discrimination against people with disabilities.

	IEP	504 plan
Who can get a plan	A child must have one or more of the 13 disabilities listed in IDEA. The disability must affect educational performance and/or the ability to learn and benefit from the general education curriculum. The child must need specialized instruction to make progress in school.	A child must have <i>any</i> type of disability that interferes with the ability to learn in a general education classroom. The disability must substantially limit one or more basic life activities. Since the requirements are broader, a child who doesn't qualify for an IEP might still be able to get a 504 plan.
Who creates the plan	With a few exceptions, the entire IEP team must be present for IEP meetings. The team includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's parent or caregiver • At least one of the child's general education teachers • At least one special education teacher • A school psychologist or other specialist who can interpret evaluation results • A district representative with authority over special education services 	The rules for who participates are less specific. The team includes people who are familiar with the child and who understand the evaluation data and special services options. This might include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child's parent or caregiver • General and special education teachers • The school principal
What's in the plan	The written IEP plan sets learning goals. It must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the child is doing in school (present level of performance) • Annual education goals and how the school will track progress • The services the child will get, including special education and 	There's no standard 504 plan. Unlike an IEP, a 504 plan doesn't have to be a written document. Plans generally include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific accommodations, supports, or services for the child

	IEP	504 plan
	<p><u>related services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timing of services (when they start, how often they occur, and how long they last) • Any accommodations (changes to the child’s learning environment) • Any modifications (changes to what the child is expected to learn or know) • How the child will participate in standardized tests • How the child will be included in general education classes and school activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Names of who will provide each service • Name of the person responsible for making sure the plan is implemented
Notice	The school has to tell families in writing <i>before</i> making a change in services or placement. Notice is also required for any IEP meetings and evaluations.	The school must notify families about an evaluation or a “significant change” in placement. Schools don’t have to put it in writing, but most do anyway.
Consent	A parent or caregiver must consent in writing for the school to evaluate a child. They must also give written consent before the school can provide the services in an IEP.	A parent or caregiver’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 plan 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.

	IEP	504 plan
How to resolve disputes	IDEA gives families several <u>ways to resolve disputes</u> with the school.	Section 504 gives families several <u>ways to resolve disputes</u> with the school.

Learn more about [special education terms](#). Check out a [visual aid that shows what goes into an IEP](#). Download a [sample 504 plan](#).



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