

IEP vs. 504 plan

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans are common kinds of school supports. Use this comparison chart to learn how they're alike and how they're different.

Question	IEP	504 plan
What is it?	A formal plan that details the special education services and supports a school will provide to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability. Includes specially designed instruction.	A formal plan for how a school will remove barriers so a student with a disability can learn alongside peers in general education. Doesn't include specially designed instruction.
Which law covers it?	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This is a federal special education law.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This is a federal civil rights law that protects against discrimination.
What's in the plan?	The IEP is a written plan. It must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Any services the school will provide, including specially designed instruction and <u>related services</u>Details about each service, like who provides it, for how many minutes a week, and whereAny accommodations (changes to the student's learning environment)Any modifications (changes to what the student is expected to learn or know)Any assistive technology or tools the school will provideHow the student will be included in general education classes and school activities	Unlike an IEP, a 504 plan doesn't have to be a written document. 504 plans generally include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Any <u>accommodations</u> (changes to the student's learning environment)Any <u>assistive technology</u> or tools the school will provideName of the person responsible for making sure the 504 plan is put into action Less common but possible to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Any services the school will provideAny modifications (changes to what the student is expected to learn or know)
How does the plan track progress?	The IEP must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Present level of performance (skill levels at the start of the plan)<u>Annual goals</u> that are measurableHow often the school will track the student's progress	504 plans typically don't track progress or include annual goals.

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Who can get a plan?	A student must meet the requirements for one or more of the 13 disability categories listed in IDEA. The disability must have an adverse or negative impact on how the student is doing in school. The student must also need specialized instruction to make progress in general education.	A student must have a disability that impacts one or more major life activities, such as reading or paying attention. Because IEPs have more requirements, a student who doesn't qualify for an IEP may still be able to get a 504 plan.
Who creates the plan?	The team that creates the IEP must include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student's parent or caregiver • At least one general education teacher • At least one special education teacher • A school psychologist or other specialist who can interpret evaluation results or other data • A district representative who has the power to approve school resources for the student 	The rules for who creates 504 plans are less specific than for IEPs. The team that creates the plan may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student's parent or caregiver • General and special education teachers • The school principal
When is a parent's consent required?	A parent or caregiver must consent in writing for the school to evaluate their child. They must also give written consent before the school can start providing the services in an IEP.	A parent or caregiver's consent is required for the school to evaluate a student.
How often is the plan reviewed?	The IEP team must review the plan at least once a year. The student must be reevaluated at least once every three years to see if they still need an IEP.	The rules vary by state. Generally, a 504 plan is reviewed each year, and a reevaluation is done every three years or when needed.
When are families notified about changes?	The school has to tell families in writing <i>before</i> the IEP team meets or makes any changes to the IEP.	The school has to tell families about a "significant change" to the 504 plan. Many schools send written notifications.
How are disputes resolved?	Families with IEPs have several dispute resolution options , ranging from talking with the school all the way up to filing a lawsuit or civil rights complaint.	Families with 504 plans have similar options. Learn about ways to resolve 504 plan disputes with the school.

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