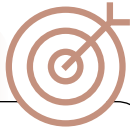


IEPs vs. 504s

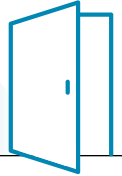
Understanding the difference between an individualized education program (IEP) and a 504 plan can help families and educators make informed decisions about the support a student needs. While both plans are designed to help students with disabilities access education, they differ significantly in eligibility, services, accommodations, goals, and legal protections. Use this quick side-by-side guide as a practical reference to understand the key differences.

IEP



- **Purpose:** Provides specialized instruction, services, and accommodations
- **Law:** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- **Eligibility:** Student must meet IDEA criteria within one of 13 federally designated disability categories
- **Instruction:** Provides specialized instruction
- **Support:** Specialized instruction, related services, accommodations, and curriculum adaptations
- **Examples:** Reading intervention, speech therapy, testing accommodations
- **Goals/progress:** Specific, measurable annual goals are required, and student progress must be reviewed at least annually
- **Review:** IEP and student progress must be reviewed at least once a year by parents and school staff
- **Team:** Requires the parent/caregiver, general education teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist or qualified specialist, and district-level administrator
- **Funding:** Supported through IDEA funding; districts also use state and local funds
- **Disputes:** Families can request meetings, file state complaints, and use other formal dispute processes; OCR complaints may also apply to disability discrimination
- **Age:** Services through age 22, or until the student exits the education system, whichever comes first

504



- **Purpose:** Removes barriers to learning and provides accommodations
- **Law:** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- **Eligibility:** Physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life activities
- **Instruction:** Focuses on accommodations within the general education classroom rather than specialized instruction
- **Support:** Accommodations and other aids/services needed for access
- **Examples:** Extra time on tests or a specific seating assignment for exams
- **Goals/progress:** Does not require specific annual goals or routine progress checks.
- **Review:** There are no specific requirements for when or how a 504 is reviewed.
- **Team:** Team composition is flexible; specific individuals are not federally required to participate
- **Funding:** No dedicated federal funding; schools absorb the costs of 504 accommodations/services
- **Disputes:** Families can file a written grievance, request a due process hearing, or file an OCR complaint
- **Age:** No federal age limit; K–12 services continue until the student transitions from the K–12 system