Understanding School Supports

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for eligible students who need special education and related services.

A Section 504 Plan is designed to provide accommodations and access for a student with a disability whose condition substantially limits a major life activity.

A helpful reminder

A medical diagnosis alone does not automatically determine whether a student qualifies for an IEP or a 504 Plan. Eligibility is based on educational criteria and individual need.

Connect With Enspire

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Clinical Inquiries

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IEP vs. 504 Plan

A Parent & Caregiver Guide



Both can support students with disabilities, but they serve different purposes and are created under different federal laws.

A simple introduction to IEPs, 504 Plans, evaluations, and questions families can ask when a child needs support at school.

EDUCATION • EVALUATION • SUPPORT

How Are They Different?

Families may hear both terms when discussing school support. Key areas to compare include:

- **Eligibility**
- **Specialized instruction**
- **Accommodations**
- **Related services**
- **Written plan**
- **School team involvement**

Important

An IEP and a 504 Plan are not interchangeable. The right plan depends on how a student's disability affects access, learning, and the need for specialized instruction.



Questions Families Can Ask

- What concerns are affecting my child at school?
- What data or evaluations has the school reviewed?
- Does my child need specialized instruction?
- What accommodations are already being used?
- How will progress be monitored?
- Who will implement the plan?
- When will the team review the plan?
- What can I do if I disagree with the decision?

Focus on the child's needs—not just the name of the plan.

When Is an Evaluation Important?

If a disability is suspected and the student may need special education or accommodations, an evaluation can help the school team understand educational needs and determine eligibility.

An evaluation may include:

- Academic performance
- Behavior & attention
- Social-emotional needs
- Disability-related impact

What Can Parents Do?

- Put concerns and requests in writing.
- Keep copies of school records and evaluations.
- Ask what data supports the school's decision.
- Participate in team meetings and ask questions.
- Request clarification when terminology is unclear.

How Enspire Can Help

Enspire provides psychological and educational evaluations and consultation to help families and schools better understand student needs and appropriate supports.

Questions? Call (215) 948-3171