

IEP vs. 504 Plan: What’s the Difference?

(Bison Bridge Behavioral Insights Parent Resource — K–12 Edition)

Why This Matters

If your child is struggling in school, you may hear terms like “IEP” and “504 Plan.” While both are designed to support students with disabilities, they are not the same. Understanding the differences helps you make the best decisions for your child.

What They Are

Feature	IEP	504 Plan
Law	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
Purpose	Provides specialized instruction and services	Provides accommodations and supports
Eligibility	Disability + need for specially designed instruction	Disability that impacts a major life activity (e.g., learning)
Plan Type	Legal document with individualized goals and services	Written plan for classroom accommodations
Team Members	Must include parent, special and general ed teachers, admin, etc.	Usually includes parent and school team
Services	May include speech, OT, counseling, specialized academic instruction	Typically accommodations like extended time or seating adjustments
Progress Monitoring	Must include specific goals and data collection	Not required, but schools often check informally
Review Timeline	Reviewed at least once a year	Reviewed periodically or as needed

Examples

IEP Examples:

- Direct reading instruction from a special education teacher
- Weekly speech-language therapy
- Behavior intervention plan with goals

504 Plan Examples:

- Preferential seating in class
- Breaks during long tasks
- Use of a calculator or audiobooks

After High School: What Continues?

504 Plans may continue after high school in college or the workplace under civil rights law. Colleges and employers must provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

IEPs do not continue after high school, but students with IEPs should have a **transition plan** starting by age 14 to prepare for life after school. This can include:

- Job readiness training
- Independent living skills
- Referrals to adult services or disability support programs

While an IEP ends at graduation, the supports and documentation from an IEP can still help students access accommodations in college — such as extended time, note-taking assistance, or testing in a separate room. Colleges may request documentation of disability and a summary of previous accommodations and modifications used.

Students can request disability documentation from their high school to share with colleges or agencies that offer support after graduation.

How to Know What Your Child Needs

- **Ask:** Does my child need specialized instruction or just accommodations?
- **Look at Data:** Review classroom performance, assessments, and intervention results
- **Talk to the School Team:** They can help determine the right path forward



Parent Reflection Space

- What challenges is my child facing in school?
 - What supports are helping — and where are the gaps?
 - Do I feel clear about what kind of plan would meet their needs?
-



Important Reminder

Both IEPs and 504 Plans offer legal protections for students with disabilities. You have the right to request an evaluation at any time. The school must consider your request and respond within specific timelines.

Learn more by visiting www.ksde.org or contacting your school's special education coordinator.