



I.E.P. & 504 PLAN BASICS WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Understanding the Difference Between an IEP and a 504 Plan in California

In California, students with disabilities may receive support through either an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 Plan. Both are designed to help students succeed in school, but they serve different purposes, follow different legal guidelines, and offer different types of support.

1. Legal Framework

- **IEP:** Governed by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires public schools to provide special education and related services to eligible students.
- **504 Plan:** Based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a civil rights law that ensures students with disabilities have equal access to education.

2. Purpose

- **IEP:** Provides specially designed instruction and related services to meet the unique educational needs of students with disabilities.
- **504 Plan:** Provides accommodations and modifications to ensure students with disabilities can access the general education curriculum.

3. Eligibility

- **IEP:** Student must have one of 13 specific disabilities listed in IDEA and require special education services.
- **504 Plan:** Student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, including learning.

4. Services Provided

- **IEP:**
 - Specialized academic instruction
 - Related services (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy)
 - Individualized goals and objectives
 - Accommodations and modifications
 - Behavioral intervention plans (if needed)
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- **504 Plan:**
 - Classroom accommodations (e.g., extended time on tests, preferential seating)
 - Modifications to schoolwork or environment
 - May include some services but not specialized instruction

5. Development and Implementation

- **IEP:** Created by a multidisciplinary IEP team including parents, general and special education teachers, school administrators, and specialists. Reviewed annually and re-evaluated every three years.
- **504 Plan:** Developed by a school-based team, typically including the student's teacher(s), a school counselor or administrator, and parents. Reviewed periodically, usually once a year.

6. Enforcement and Protections

- **IEP:** Provides procedural safeguards under IDEA, including the right to mediation and due process.
- **504 Plan:** Offers protection under civil rights law. Parents may file complaints with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

Conclusion While both IEPs and 504 Plans support students with disabilities in California, the type of plan a student receives depends on the nature and extent of their disability and educational needs. Understanding the differences helps families and educators choose the most appropriate path to ensure academic success and access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE).