

504 Plan vs. IEP

Two ways a school can support a child with a disability — laid side by side, in plain language, so you can tell which one fits.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

These two plans get talked about a lot, and they're easy to mix up. This page lays them side by side so you can see how they differ before you walk into a meeting. Read it ahead of time, mark the rows that sound like your child, and bring it with you. You don't have to decide which plan is right on your own — that's a team decision — but knowing the difference helps you ask sharper questions and recognize the right fit when you hear it.

	504 Plan Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (a civil rights law)	IEP Individualized Education Program, under IDEA (the special education law)
The core idea	Removes barriers so your child can access the same instruction as classmates. Think access.	Provides instruction designed specifically for your child — changing how, and sometimes what, they're taught. Think specialized teaching.
Who it's for	A child with any disability that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning or reading. Broader, and often easier to qualify for.	A child whose disability fits one of IDEA's categories (dyslexia falls under "specific learning disability") and who needs specialized instruction to make progress.
What it usually includes	Accommodations — extended time on tests, preferential seating, audiobooks, assistive technology. No specialized instruction.	Measurable goals, progress tracking, specialized instruction, and related services like speech or occupational therapy. More detailed.
Your protections as a parent	Fewer formal steps. Disagreements generally go through the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR).	Stronger procedural rights — written progress reports, the right to a due process complaint, and the right to request an independent evaluation.

WHAT THEY SHARE

Both are free, both are legally required, and both must provide your child a free appropriate public education (FAPE) — a free education that actually meets their needs.

If your child has dyslexia

Leave with the written plan and a follow-up date, then watch for progress. If things stall or you still have concerns, remember you can request a formal evaluation in writing — you don't have to wait for the next SST meeting to act.

HOW TO DECIDE — AND WHAT TO DO NEXT

- » **It isn't a ranking.** Neither plan is "better." The right one is the plan that matches what your child actually needs — more support is not automatically the right support.
- » **Either path starts the same way:** put your request for an evaluation in writing. That's your right, and it's how the school determines which plan fits.
- » **Because eligibility steps, 504 review timelines, and local process differ by state,** complete the [free Personalized Results Guide](#) at stridable.com to see what applies where you live.

Sources: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794; U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq.; 34 C.F.R. Part 300 (sites.ed.gov/idea).

This guide is for general information only and is not legal advice. It's designed to help you prepare and take well-informed actions on behalf of your child. Laws, timelines, and school policies vary by state and can change, so check the current rules where you live. For help with your specific situation, consider speaking with an educational advocate or special education attorney. Stridable is not a law firm and does not provide legal representation.