

IEP and Section 504 Comparison

A concise reference for understanding two different support frameworks

Feature	IEP under IDEA	Section 504 plan
Purpose	Special education and related services for an eligible student who needs specially designed instruction.	Prevents disability discrimination and provides access through appropriate aids, services, or accommodations.
Eligibility focus	IDEA disability category plus adverse educational effect and need for special education.	Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
Document	Individualized education program with required components.	Written plans are common and useful, though Section 504 does not use IDEA's IEP requirements.
Instruction	May include specially designed instruction, related services, supplementary aids, and accommodations.	Often includes accommodations and related aids or services needed for equal access.
Procedures	IDEA evaluation, team, notice, consent, review, and dispute-resolution protections.	Section 504 evaluation, placement, notice, records review, and due process protections. Local procedures vary.

Questions to ask

- What need are we trying to address?
- Does the student require specially designed instruction or access supports?
- What evaluation data support the eligibility decision?
- How will supports be documented, implemented, and monitored?

Important: This educational resource provides general information and is not legal advice or legal representation. Special education procedures and timelines may vary by state. Review your state safeguards and consult a qualified professional about your circumstances.

Primary reference: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act regulations, 34 CFR Part 300, and U.S. Department of Education IDEA resources at sites.ed.gov/idea.