IEP Roadmap: How to Seek Out Special Education Services for Your Child

Getting an Individualized Education Program for your child may seem complicated. But the process actually boils down to a few key questions. Use this chart to see how the system works and what your options are.

START

Send your school a written request for an evaluation for special education.

The strongest requests include clear evidence such as samples of schoolwork, time spent on homework or lack of progress in small-group instruction or other kinds of interventions.

Did the school approve your request for an evaluation?

YES

Consider your options

You can seek a 504 plan or dispute resolution at this point, but there are lots of other things you can do too.

NO

Gather more information about your child's needs and submit another request for an evaluation.

Pay a qualified professional to do a private evaluation. The school must consider the findings and will respond in one of two ways:

The school will either conduct its own evaluation...

...or move ahead to the eligibility determination meeting.

Did the school find that your child meets the eligibility requirements for special education?

YES

Consider your options

The school will either conduct its own evaluation...

NO

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A school team gives your child a free, comprehensive evaluation of her needs.

Eligibility requirements: To qualify for special education, kids must have a disability in one of 13 categories covered in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The disability also must "adversely affect" their education.

In most states, the time limit for schools to complete an evaluation is 60 calendar days after parents give consent.

Schools have to give parents time to review the evaluation before the school team meets to discuss eligibility. Ask your school about its policy.

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The most common disability categories for learning and attention issues are specific learning disability, speech or language impairment and other health impairment (which covers ADHD).

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Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written plan tailored to meet your child's unique needs. Many kids with IEPs spend most of the day in general education classrooms.

If the school won't pay for an IEE, you might have the option of paying for a private evaluation.

Seek dispute resolution, such as using a mediator or filing a due process or other legal complaint.

Request a 504 plan. Unlike an IEP, a 504 plan doesn't require specialized instruction. But schools may be required to provide accommodations, modifications and, in some cases, services to students with disabilities.

Work with the school to create an Individualized Education Program provided at no cost to you. Common components include:

- Individualized instruction
- Accommodations (like extended time on tests)
- Modifications (like shortened assignments)
- Related services (like speech therapy)
- Assistive technology

For more tips and resources, go to

Understood