



# Supporting diverse learners

A pocket guide to terms commonly used in the education of students with disabilities.

If you're a newer teacher or just stepping into the world of special education, you might find the jargon surrounding Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans a bit overwhelming. But don't worry—you're not alone, and we're here to help!

This guide is designed to be your handy companion as you navigate the IEP process and support your students with diverse learning needs.

Every student deserves an equitable education, and as you learn more about IEPs and 504 plans, you'll be better equipped to create an inclusive environment where all learners can thrive.

So, take a deep breath, dive in, and remember: supporting diverse learners is not just a responsibility—it's an incredible opportunity to make a lasting impact on your students' lives!

## 504 Plan

A plan developed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that provides accommodations to students with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to education in a general education setting.

## Accommodations

[Changes](#) in how a student accesses learning without altering the learning expectations (e.g., extended time on tests, preferential seating).

## Annual Goals

Specific, measurable objectives outlined in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), detailing what they should achieve within one year.

## Assistive Technology (AT)

Tools and devices used to help students with disabilities access the curriculum and demonstrate their learning (e.g., text-to-speech software, communication devices).

## 504 Plan

A plan developed under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that provides accommodations to students with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to education in a general education setting.

## Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)

A plan that outlines strategies and supports to address behavior issues in students with disabilities, often developed in response to a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA).

## Disability Categories

A plan developed under Section 504 of the [categories of disabilities](#) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), such as specific learning disability, autism, etc.) that students may qualify under to receive special education services. Evaluation results help determine the appropriate category.

## Evaluation Team Report (ETR)

A term used in some states to describe the formal document that summarizes the findings of the student's evaluation process. It includes information gathered from assessments, observations, and input from a team of professionals and the student's parents to determine if the student qualifies for special education services.

## Extended School Year (ESY)

Special education services provided beyond the regular school year to students who would otherwise regress significantly during long breaks.

## Extended Standards

Modified learning goals (also called alternate standards or alternate academic achievement standards) designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities who are unable to meet traditional grade-level standards, even with accommodations. These standards are derived from the general education curriculum but are simplified in complexity and depth to provide access to academic content that is appropriate for the student's abilities.

## Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

The right of students with disabilities to receive an education that is tailored to their individual needs, at no cost to the family.

## **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)**

An assessment process used to identify the causes of challenging behaviors and guide the development of a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).

## **Inclusion**

An educational practice in which students with disabilities are integrated into general education classrooms alongside their non-disabled peers, rather than being placed in separate special education settings. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) stipulates that students with disabilities should be placed in general education settings whenever possible, rather than being separated into special education classrooms, unless their disability is so severe that they cannot make progress even with support.

## **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

A federal law in the United States that ensures students with disabilities are provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) tailored to their individual needs.

## **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

A legal document outlining special education services, accommodations, and goals for students with disabilities. It is developed annually by a team, including teachers, parents, and specialists.

## **Initial Evaluation**

The first comprehensive assessment conducted to determine whether a student qualifies for special education services. This evaluation must assess all areas related to the suspected disability (e.g., cognitive, academic, behavioral, social-emotional, motor skills). Some states may call this a Multifactorial Evaluation (MFE).

## **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

A principle requiring that students with disabilities are educated to the greatest extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers, while still meeting their educational needs.

## **Modifications**

Changes in what a student is expected to learn, often altering the educational content or performance expectations (e.g., changes in grading standards).

## **Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)**

A group of professionals from different disciplines (e.g., general education teacher, special education teacher, psychologist) who collaborate to assess and develop plans for students with disabilities.

## **Occupational Therapist (OT)**

A professional who helps students develop or improve fine motor skills, sensory integration, and other skills necessary for daily activities in the school setting.

## **Paraprofessional**

A classroom aide who assists students with disabilities under the supervision of a certified teacher, providing individualized or small group support.

## **Present Levels of Performance (PLOP)**

A section of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) that describes a student's current academic and functional performance and sets the baseline for goal setting.

## Procedural Safeguards Notice

A legal document provided to parents of children with disabilities, explaining their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It details the protections and entitlements parents have throughout the special education process, including evaluation, development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and dispute resolution.

## Progress Monitoring

The regular assessment of a student's academic performance to determine the effectiveness of interventions and to guide any necessary adjustments.

## Progress Report

A report provided to parents at regular intervals, typically aligned with the school's grading periods, that outlines the student's progress toward meeting their Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals.

## Re-evaluation

A mandatory evaluation that occurs at least every three years for students with an IEP to determine if they continue to qualify for special education services or if adjustments are needed. Re-evaluations can occur sooner if requested by the parent or school staff. Sometimes called the triennial review. Some states may call this a Multifactorial Evaluation (MFE).

## Related Services

Additional support services provided to students with disabilities to help them benefit from special education (e.g., speech therapy, occupational therapy, counseling).

## Response to Intervention (RTI)

A multi-tiered approach to identify and support students with learning and behavior needs. It often precedes formal evaluations and helps determine if special education services are needed.

## Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP)

A professional who assesses and provides therapy to students with speech, language, and communication needs.

## Transition Services

Planning and services provided to students with IEPs to prepare them for post-secondary education, employment, or independent living after high school.

### Want to hear from teachers in the classroom?

Check out our blog post on inclusive education from educator Dave Hall, "[A Teacher's Argument for Inclusive Classrooms](#)."

Listen to our *Year One* podcast episode about first-year teacher Jenna MacNulty's experience encountering IEPs, "[Special Accommodations](#)."



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