

# Understanding the Transition from a 504 Plan to an IEP

*A Classroom Guide for Supporting Students Through Changes in Educational Services*

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## Purpose & Overview

This guide supports educators in understanding the transition from a Section 504 Plan to an Individualized Education Program (IEP). While both plans provide support for students with disabilities, they differ in eligibility, services, and level of support.

The purpose of this guide is to help teachers understand what this transition means and how to support students as they move from accommodations to more individualized instruction and specialized services.

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## Instructional Outcomes

By applying this guide, teachers will be able to:

- Understand the differences between 504 Plans and IEPs
  - Recognize when a student may need additional support
  - Support students during the transition process
  - Collaborate with support teams and families
  - Align classroom practices with IEP requirements
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## Key Differences Between a 504 Plan and an IEP

| <b>Feature</b>         | <b>504 Plan</b>                        | <b>IEP</b>   |
|------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Purpose</b>         | Provides access through accommodations | Provides specialized instruction and services                                |
| <b>Eligibility</b>     | Disability impacts access to learning  | Disability impacts academic performance and requires specialized instruction |
| <b>Support Type</b>    | Accommodations (e.g., extended time)   | Accommodations & specialized instruction                                     |
| <b>Legal Framework</b> | Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act  | Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)                           |

Understanding these differences helps teachers support students more effectively.

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## **What the Transition Means**

When a student moves from a 504 Plan to an IEP, it typically means:

- The student requires more intensive, individualized support
- Accommodations alone are no longer sufficient
- The student may receive specialized instruction
- Progress will be monitored more formally

This transition reflects a need for increased support, not failure.

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## **Teacher Role During the Transition**

Teachers play an important role by:

- Observing and documenting student needs
  - Providing input during evaluation and meetings
  - Implementing accommodations and supports
  - Communicating with support staff and families
  - Supporting the student emotionally during the transition
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## **Supporting Students During the Transition**

Students may feel uncertain about changes in their support. Teachers can help by:

- Explaining supports in student-friendly language
  - Reinforcing that supports are designed to help them succeed
  - Encouraging questions and open communication
  - Promoting a positive and supportive classroom environment
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## **Student Awareness Check-In**

Teachers can support student understanding by asking:

- What supports help you learn best?
  - What do you find challenging in class?
  - What helps you feel successful during learning?
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## Student Reflection Example

| <i>Reflection Question</i>         | <i>Student Response</i>          |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>What helps me learn best?</i>   | Extra time and teacher support   |
| <i>What is challenging for me?</i> | Reading long passages            |
| <i>What support helps me most?</i> | Breaking work into smaller steps |

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## Teacher Implementation Reflection

- Do I understand the differences between a 504 Plan and an IEP?
  - Am I implementing supports consistently?
  - Am I communicating with the support team effectively?
  - Do I understand the student’s individual needs?
  - Am I helping the student feel supported during the transition?
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## Connection to Instruction and Support

Transitioning to an IEP allows for:

- more targeted instruction
- individualized learning goals
- increased monitoring of progress

- additional support services

This helps ensure students receive the support needed to succeed academically and developmentally.

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## **Closing Reflection**

The transition from a 504 Plan to an IEP represents an important step in providing students with the support they need. When teachers understand the process and provide consistent support, students can experience greater success, confidence, and growth.