



I WANT YOU!

The Family Café CHANGE AGENT NETWORK THEY NEED YOU!

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This Newsletter Is A Project Of The Family Cafe

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The Change Agent Network is a project of The Family Café and offers an opportunity for advocates and change agents to work collaboratively to transform the system by: combining abilities, skills, ideas, and talents; standing together for meaningful system reform measures; taking the lead in our communities and neighborhoods; sharing Information to help families become effective players within their communities; developing statewide networks to organize and discuss the issues that are most important to families and persons with disabilities; and creating a united position on critical disability policy issues.

Transitioning into the New School Year

With the calendar turning to August, it's time for parents and students to start preparing to transition into a new school year. For students with disabilities and their families, this is the time of year to get ready to educate new teachers and new schools about the accommodations and supports that will need to be in place to help ensure educational success.

For students with disabilities, those supports and accommodations are often laid out in an Individual Education Plan (IEP). In other cases, or a 504 Plan might be preferable. While an IEP and a 504 Plan can both be essential to a positive educational experience, there are important differences between the two. To help explain those differences, we've included an article that answers some key questions about each in this month's issue.

It's also true that with each passing school year, every student is getting closer to that moment when they will transition to the adult world, and move into the workforce or on to higher education. One of the key state agencies that supports young people in that transition is the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Students as young as 14 are eligible to enroll with VR. So in the spirit of starting early, we've included a special guest article from VR on the services they offer, and how to access them. It's never too early to start thinking ahead!



Whether you are the parent of a child starting in school for the first time, the family members of a young person heading off to college or the workforce, or anywhere in between, The Family Café wishes you the very best of luck in the new school year! We believe in you!



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What is the Difference between an IEP and a 504 Plan?

As we begin preparations for a new school year, it's important to understand the differences in the accommodation plans available to students with disabilities in the public school system. It's critical that parents making this decision for the first time understand that the plan they choose will have major consequences for their student in their educational career. Here is what you need to know:

What is the difference between the two?

An IEP (or an Individual Education Plan) outlines a child's plan for their special education track at their school. A 504 plan will outline how a child will have access to learning at school. An IEP is an official legal document that all students with disabilities are entitled to by law. It is a collaborative legal agreement that will include a list of things the school will do or provide to help your student succeed.

What are the eligibility requirements for each?

There are two requirements for a student to qualify for an IEP: (1) The child has one or more of the thirteen disabilities specifically identified in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (2) The student's disability must impact their educational performance and/or ability to learn and benefit from the general educational curriculum which requires the need for specialized instruction.

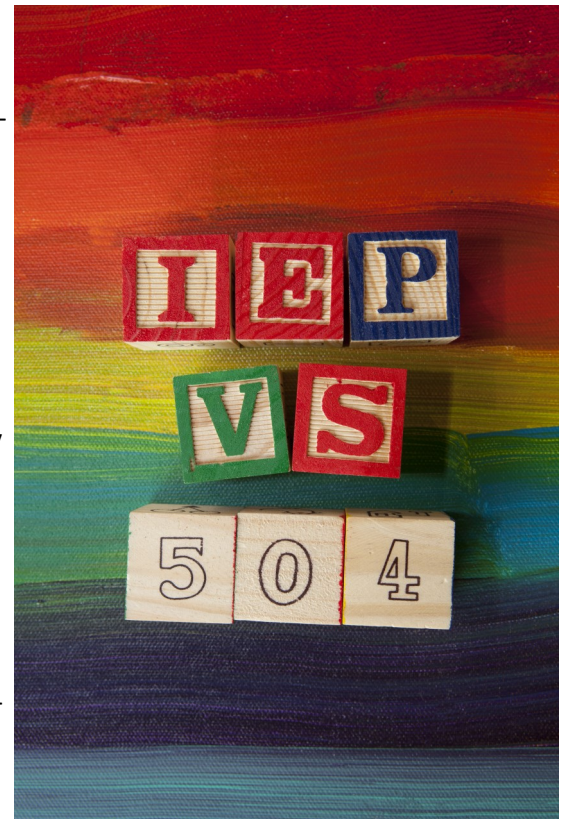
In a 504 plan, the student may have any disability. This includes learning or attention issues. Also, the disability must interfere with the child's ability to learn in a general education classroom. A 504 plan allows for a wider definition of a disability than the IDEA. A student who doesn't qualify for an IEP may still qualify for a 504 plan, as long as their disability substantially limits one or more basic life activities, such as learning.



What do each specifically do?

An IEP allows for individualized special education to meet the unique needs of the student. A 504 plan provides services and changes to the learning environment to meet the needs of the child as adequately as other students. Both plans are provided at no cost to parents.

What is an Independent Educational Evaluation?

With an IEP plan the parents of a student *can* ask the school district to pay for an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) by an outside expert, but the School District is not required to agree. Parents are free to pay for an outside evaluation, but know





that the District is not required to give it much weight. In a 504 plan, parents are not allowed to ask for an IEE.

Who is allowed to participate in the creation of these plans?

With an IEP there are legal requirements as to who participates in the creation of the plan. The team is required to include: at least one of the child's parents, a minimum of one of the child's general education teachers, at least one special education teacher, a school psychologist or other specialist who can interpret evaluation results, and a district representative with authority over special education services.

In a 504 plan, the rules as to who participates are less specific. A 504 may be created by individuals that are familiar with the child and who understand the evaluation data and service options. Typically this would include: a parent, the general and special education teachers, and the school's principal.

What will be included in the program?

An IEP plan is required to set learning goals and to lay out the services the school will give the student. It is an official document that can be referred back to throughout the child's educational career. An IEP must include the child's current levels of academic and functional performance, and annual education goals for the student and how the school will track their progress. It also must identify the services the child will get, which may include special education, related, supplementary, and extended school year services, timing of these services (when they begin, end, and for how long), the accommodations that will be offered, and modifications, which are what the child is expected to learn or know, how the child will participate in standardized tests, and lastly, how the child will be included in general education classes and school activities.

With a 504 plan, it is not required that this be a written document. It will usually include the accommodations being offered including supports and/or services, who will be providing each service, and the individual responsible for ensuring the plan is implemented.

How often are these plans reviewed?

The IEP team must review the IEP at least once a year. The student must be reevaluated every three years to determine whether services are still needed. 504 plans are generally reviewed each year and a reevaluation is done every three years, or when needed.

Who pays for all this?

The short answer is that all of us as taxpayers pay for these services. IEP plans are a service that is given to qualified students at no charge. States receive additional funding for eligible students. Students receive these services at no charge. In 504 plans, States do not receive extra funding for eligible students, however the federal government can take funding away from programs (including schools) that don't comply. IDEA funds can't be used to serve students with 504 plans.



Finding the Right Career Path with Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Services

When you think of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), you may think of employment support for someone with a disability beyond high-school or upon reaching age 22. But, did you know that services are offered starting at age 14 to assist in preparing students for employment? If you or a member of your family are a student with a disability (have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan that outlines services to be provided), and are in middle school, high school, a career/technical school, or in college, then this information should not be skipped!

VR is a federal-state program that helps students with disabilities prepare for a career, and then continue their education or find employment after high school. Students have the opportunity to participate in career counseling, self-advocacy training, work readiness training, integrated work experiences, and educational counseling while enrolled in school.

In the past, students had to apply and go through an eligibility process to receive services — that is the traditional VR program. Now, under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), students may access limited Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) without having to apply to or be found eligible for VR.

For a student to receive Pre-ETS through VR, they must be 14-21 years old, and have current documentation indicating that they are being served as a student with a disability. Students may receive Pre-ETS by having a School District Representative or VR staff enter a referral through the Student Transition Activities Record (STAR) portal. Referrals may come from anyone. This is a wonderful option for students who are self-directed, independent, and require little support.

Students who need more support or additional services are encouraged to apply to VR. Students who require services beyond Pre-ETS to reach their employment goal may receive Supported Employment, placement services, postsecondary training or education, time limited treatment, assistive technology or devices, workplace accommodations, transportation, and other needed services. The program may extend beyond age 22 for those applying to VR who are found eligible, and can continue until they become successfully employed. An IPE is developed with a VR counselor for those who are eligible and have a goal of achieving gainful employment.

Once an individual is referred for Pre-ETS, the chosen pre-employment transition service(s) begin.

Examples of what students learn by participating in Pre-ETS are:

- **Job Exploration Counseling:** Explores career path options that are best suited for the individual's skills, abilities, aptitudes, and interests.
- **Work Readiness Training:** Focuses on employability and related skills that prepare the student to work. Resume writing, mock interviews, searching for and applying for jobs online, managing employer contacts, handling conflicts, navigating public transportation, and reviewing employee handbook/benefits are covered as a part of this training.
- **Work-Based Learning Experiences:** Allows students to apply and practice soft social skills, gain an idea of what work is about, develop work skills, gain experience, and identify any needed work accommodations. These experiences focus on practicing social skills and building relationships (including what's appropriate or not at the workplace).
- **Self-Advocacy Training & Peer Mentoring:** Focuses on becoming self-aware, knowing your rights, how to talk about needs and requesting reasonable accommodations, setting goals and developing an action plan, and making decisions about one's own life to become more independent.
- **Postsecondary Educational Counseling:** Provides information about continuing education options, school choice, assessing financial aid, etc.

Programs are offered when the student is available to participate, including when school is not in session (after school, evenings, weekends, holidays, spring break, summer or early release days), or during the school day when coordinated with educators.

To receive a referral for Pre-ETS, speak with your school's ESE specialist or guidance counselor, or if attending a private school, the transition services specialist. You may also request a referral from a local VR office. For more information on VR or to access their interactive Office Directory, please visit www.RehabWorks.org.

