

## Section 504 vs. IDEA

Section 504 is a federal civil rights law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education. Section 504 requires recipients to provide to students with disabilities appropriate educational services designed to meet the individual needs of such students to the same extent as the needs of students without disabilities are met.

Section 504 is intended to establish a “level playing field” usually by eliminating barriers that exclude persons with disabilities.

To be qualified under section 504, a student must be determined to:

1. have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
2. have a record of such an impairment; **or**
3. be regarded as having such an impairment.

IDEA is a federal funding statute whose purpose is to provide financial aid to states in their efforts to ensure adequate and appropriate services for disabled children.

IDEA identifies specific categories of qualifying conditions. A student is only eligible to receive IDEA services if the multidisciplinary team determines that the student is disabled under one of the qualifying conditions and requires special education. “Appropriate education” means a program designed to provide “educational benefit.”

IDEA often requires the provision of programs and services in addition to those available to persons without disabilities. It requires a written and specific IEP document.

The definition of a disability under Section 504 is much broader than the definition under IDEA. All IDEA students are also covered by Section 504, but not all Section 504 students are eligible for services under IDEA.