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[Toolkit Basics: Where to Begin When a Student Needs More Help](#)

When a student has unmet needs and may need new or different school-based services, what to do next can feel confusing or overwhelming. PAVE provides this toolkit to support families in taking initial, critical steps. These guidelines apply regardless of where school happens.

[Is Disability a Factor?](#)

Before acting, the family can consider disability and its impact. PAVE's overview article about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ([IDEA: The Foundation of Special Education](#)) describes 14 disability categories. If criteria are met in one of those categories, a student is eligible for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). An IEP team that includes family caregivers determines how special education services are provided.

[IDEA and/or Section 504?](#)

If a student does not meet IDEA eligibility, the student may still have disability protections under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. A family can consider whether disability impacts a "major life activity" that overlaps with school impact. If so, a Section 504 Plan supports the student with accommodations that enable equitable access to school. A student with an IEP has protections under IDEA and Section 504; accommodations are built into the IEP. PAVE provides an article: [Section 504: A Plan for Equity, Access and Accommodations](#).

PAVE's video library about special education process is a place to get information about how to proceed: [Student Rights, IEP, Section 504 and More](#).

[Request Evaluation](#)

If a student has not been identified for school-based services, the first step is to request an educational evaluation. State deadlines apply to formal requests. PAVE provides an article with basic information about that process and a sample letter format for requesting a free evaluation from the school district: [Sample Letter to Request Evaluation](#).



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Request IEP Meeting

Families can request an IEP meeting to discuss the program any time there are concerns. PAVE provides an article, which suggests a format for making the request and includes information about meeting requirements: [Sample Letter to Request an IEP Meeting](#).

Parents have the right to participate in all meetings where a student's special education services are discussed. Those rights are protected by federal and state laws. A court settlement in 2013 includes statements that family rights are more important than other legal requirements, such as renewal deadlines. More information about that case, [Doug C. Versus Hawaii](#), is included in PAVE's article: [Parent Participation in Special Education Process is a Priority Under Federal Law](#).

Prepare for the Meeting

Whether meeting to discuss an IEP, a Section 504 Plan, behavior, ancillary services, or something else, families are better served when they prepare. To help families organize their concerns and requests, PAVE offers a format for designing a [Handout for the Team Meeting](#). An alternative version supports self-advocates: [Students: Get Ready to Participate in Your IEP Meeting with a Handout for the Team](#).

IEP Process Demystified

Procedural safeguards protect family and student rights throughout the special education process. A [copy of the procedural safeguards](#) is offered at all formal meetings. Procedural Safeguards explain how the process of special education is designed to work and can help families monitor whether their rights and the rights of their student are being upheld. If anyone suspects the school is doing something wrong in the provision of special education services, they have the right to dispute resolution options.

Filing a community complaint is one dispute resolution option. PAVE provides a training video: [Procedural Safeguards: How to File a Special Education Complaint](#). The training helps families know where to get a community complaint form and provides a case study example to describe how to complete the form. The community complaint process is a no-cost option for families of children who receive special education services.