



PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACTION. VOICES FOR EMPOWERMENT.

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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.

If your family is new to Washington State, military connected, or you just need help to understand how education is structured here, a great place to start learning is to read, download, or print PAVE's article, [Help for Military Families: Tips to Navigate Special Education Process in Washington State](#).

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](#).

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



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](#).

Prepare for the Meeting

Families are more successful in their advocacy when they prepare for a meeting with the school. Families can write down questions and concerns to share before the meeting to make sure their primary topics of concern are included in the meeting agenda.

To help families get organized, 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](#).

Here are a few common meeting topics, with prompts to consider and links to more information from PAVE:

- **Evaluation request**
 - Has a request been submitted [in writing](#)?
 - Will the school evaluate to determine eligibility and needs?
 - Are [student rights](#) being upheld, including Child Find, which protects the right to evaluation?
- **IEP goals and progress monitoring**
 - Do [goals](#) need to be changed or rewritten?
 - Is the student's progress appropriate in light of their circumstances?
 - Is the school tracking and sharing information about [student progress](#)?
 - PAVE provides an article to help you [read and understand the IEP](#).
- **Accommodations on an IEP or Section 504 Plan**
 - Are [accommodations](#) being implemented?
 - Who is responsible for the accommodations—student or staff?
 - Is the current plan working to help the student access their learning?



- **Placement**
 - Is the student's right to education in the Least Restrictive Environment ([LRE](#)) being upheld?
 - Is the placement student-centered or a result of resource challenges?
 - Has the IEP team considered a range of [placement options](#) to meet the student's needs if education in the LRE cannot be achieved successfully?
- **Related Services**
 - Are [related services](#) being provided as listed in the IEP services matrix?
 - Do parents understand what is being provided, and by whom?
 - If related services are a critical aspect of the meeting, are staff providing those services invited to the meeting?
- **Behavior**
 - Does the student have or need [behavioral interventions](#)?
 - Has a request been made for a Functional Behavioral Assessment ([FBA](#))?
 - Is [behavior](#) being supported in ways that reinforce skill development?
- **Literacy**
 - Has the student been evaluated for a Specific Learning Disability?
 - Is there a diagnosis of [Dyslexia](#)?
 - Is [Text-to-Speech](#) provided as an accommodation?

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.