



PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACTION. VOICES FOR EMPOWERMENT.

800-5-PARENT - 253-565-2266 - WWW.WAPAVE.ORG



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 the civil right to help, protected by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. An educational evaluation determines whether there is a disability impacting a "major life activity." If so, a Section 504 Plan enables the student to access school with individualized supports and accommodations. PAVE provides an article: [Section 504: A Plan for Equity, Access and Accommodations](#). Note that a student with an IEP has protections from special education law (IDEA) and civil rights protections from Section 504.



A three-part video series from PAVE provides more information: [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.](#)

An article with comprehensive information about the evaluation process, an infographic showing evaluation deadlines, and specific resources related to each disability category is titled: [Evaluations Part 1: Where to Start When a Student Needs Special Help at School.](#) The article includes a list of skill areas that schools commonly evaluate. When signing their consent for an evaluation to begin, families want to ensure that all areas of suspected disability and educational impact are included for a comprehensive evaluation process.

If a student's behavior is impacting school, a Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA) can be part of an evaluation process. The assessment is used to develop a behavior support plan, called a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP). PAVE provides resources to help with behavioral support planning:

- Two-part video training: [Behavior and School: How to Participate in the FBA/BIP Process](#)
- [Sample Letter to Request a Functional Behavioral Assessment](#)
- [Handout/Worksheet to support BIP development](#)

## 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. PAVE provides [Advocacy Tips for Parents](#) to help families consider what to do when requesting a meeting, during the meeting, and as follow up to their meeting with the school.

After every formal meeting, the school is required to send family participants a [Prior Written Notice](#) (PWN), a document that explains school district decisions about a student's services. Family members can request changes to the PWN if their concerns or



positions are inaccurately described or left out of the PWN. Like all formal school documents, the PWN must be provided in the family's [native language](#).

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?



PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACTION. VOICES FOR EMPOWERMENT.

800-5-PARENT - 253-565-2266 - WWW.WAPAVE.ORG

- **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. Here's another resource for general information about special education process and how to participate: The Seattle Special Education PTSA has built a family-friendly [Guide to Special Education](#), downloadable in 10 languages.