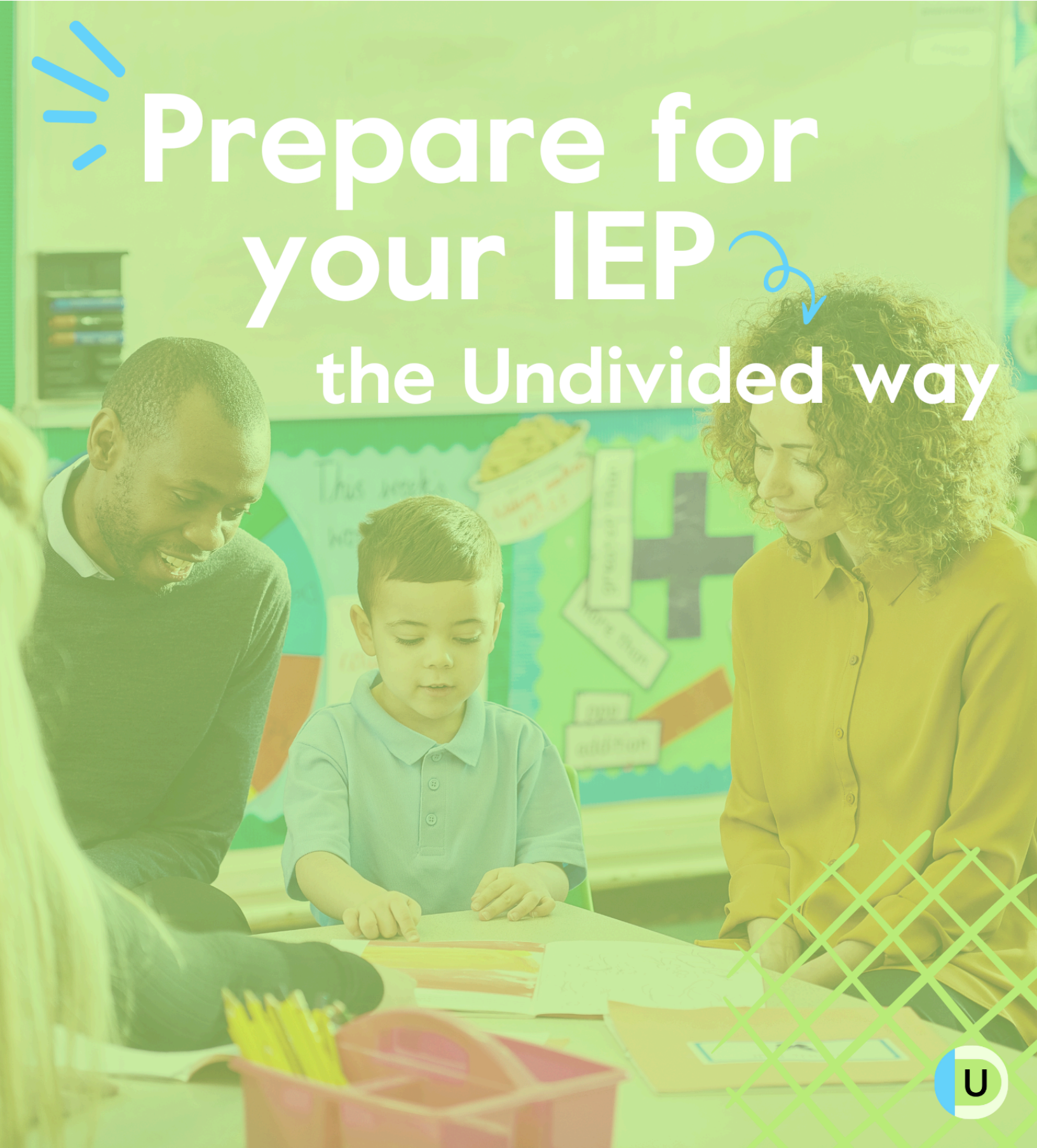




Prepare for your IEP

the Undivided way



Undivided's IEP prep packet for parents

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IEP basics

What is an IEP?

An IEP outlines services and supports that the school or district will provide, at no cost to the student's family, to ensure that the student has access to a [free and appropriate public education \(FAPE\) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#), and that their individual needs are met. Every child who receives special education services must have an IEP.

Who qualifies for an IEP?

A child is eligible for an IEP if they meet the criteria for one of the [eligibility categories](#) and if they cannot make adequate progress in school without special education services. These are the 13 categories in the state of California:

1. Autism spectrum disorder
2. Deafness
3. Deaf-blindness
4. Emotional disturbance (broad category signifying mental health needs)
5. Hearing impairment
6. Intellectual disability
7. Multiple disabilities
8. Other health impairment (conditions that limit a child's strength, energy, or alertness)
9. Orthopedic impairment
10. Specific learning disability
11. Speech or language impairment
12. Traumatic brain injury
13. Visual impairment, including blindness

If a student is not eligible for an IEP, they may still qualify for a 504 plan. ([Learn more about the differences between a 504 plan and an IEP here.](#))

Who writes an IEP?

After a formal assessment has been conducted by the school or district, the IEP team is created. This group of individuals includes key school staff and the child's parent(s). The team will meet and review the assessments and any other relevant information about the child. If it is determined that the student is eligible for special educational services, the team will design a program to address the child's

educational needs that result from their disability. Remember that parents are the most important members of an IEP team and have a right to fully participate. [Read about the IEP team's key players and their roles.](#)

How are students assessed for an IEP?

In order to qualify for an IEP, a student must receive an initial full assessment. A full assessment is a multidisciplinary set of assessments conducted by a school psychologist, special education teacher, and any additional related service providers who are relevant to the student's disability – these can include [speech](#), [occupational](#), [behavioral](#), vision, and [physical therapists](#), and more. A parent can request an assessment of their child at any time. (Here is a [sample letter](#) parents can use to request an assessment for an IEP.)

If a student qualifies for special education services, a full reassessment is conducted every three years (called a triennial assessment) to ensure that they still qualify for special education services. A child's IEP must also be reviewed once a year at minimum to determine whether the annual goals are being achieved or must be revised. Read more about the [types of assessments conducted for IEPs](#).

When is the IEP developed?

An IEP meeting must be held within thirty calendar days after it is determined through an assessment that a child has one of the qualifying diagnoses listed in IDEA and needs special education and related services. Read more about [IEP timelines and the steps involved](#).

What are the components of an IEP?

An IEP includes the following:

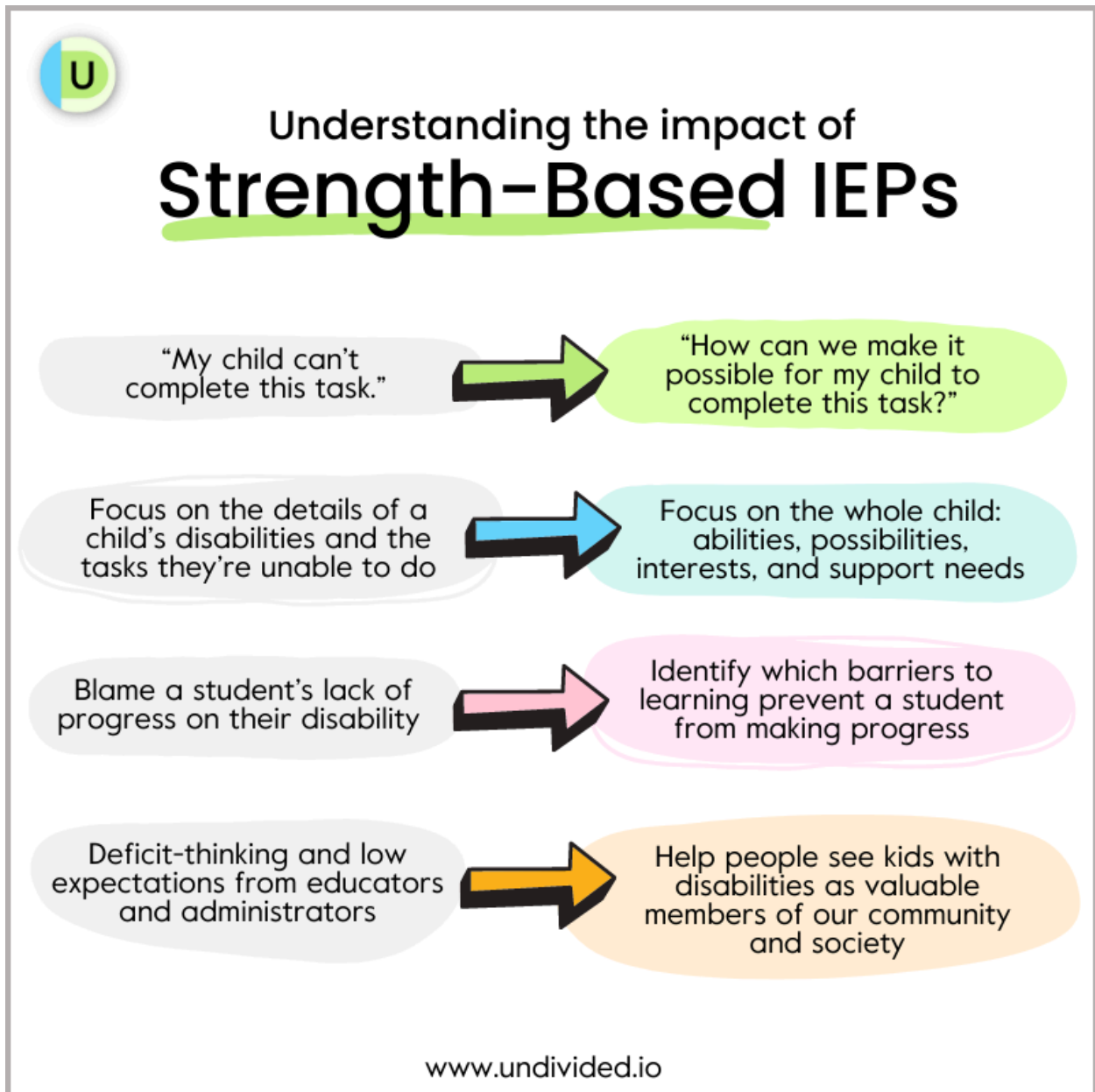
- Parent concerns
- Student strengths
- Goal review
- Present levels of performance (PLOP)
- Progress reporting
- Annual goals and short-term objectives

- Special education and related services
- Supplementary aids and services, also known as accommodations and modifications
- Extent of non-participation in general education
- Statewide assessments
- Service delivery (offer of FAPE), which often includes placement

We break all of these down in our article on [key parts of an IEP](#).

What is a strength-based IEP?

A [strength-based IEP](#) prioritizes a child's strengths by focusing on and utilizing the skills they already have rather than focusing on their deficits. This helps educators develop appropriately challenging goals and objectives in their curriculum, and it ensures that the services and supports provided for your child will work to actively enhance skills and eliminate barriers to learning.



You can begin by [writing a vision statement](#) to share with the IEP team. “A vision statement is what we want out of life for our child and what our child wants out of life,” says Dr. Caitlin Solone, education advocate, teacher educator, and faculty at UCLA. Take time to write a few sentences about your hopes for your child and what you believe they can achieve. What are their lifelong objectives? Once you’ve identified the opportunities you’d like for them to work toward, think about what goals you’d like to focus on this year. How can you build an IEP that will support your child in achieving and building toward those goals?

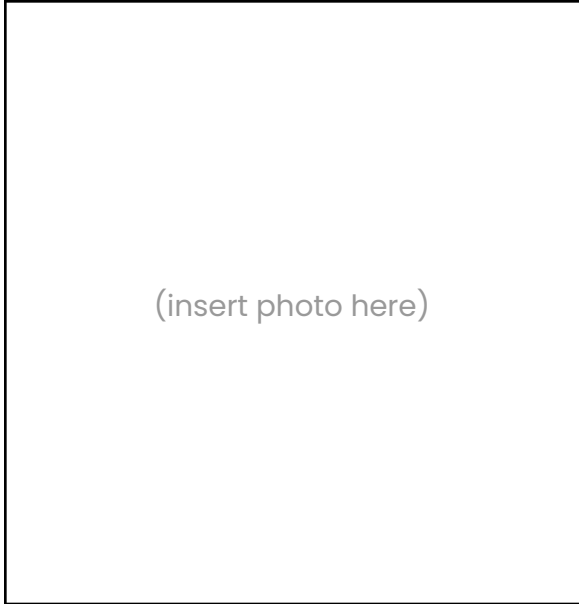
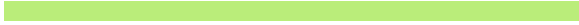
Consider what your child’s life should be like: big-picture things that the professional team members might not think of, like friendship and belonging in the school community. What will middle and high school look like as well as extracurricular activities and social life? Will your child maybe go to college or work, and what kind of skills do they need to acquire along the way for that to be meaningful?

If your child’s school does not include a vision statement in their IEP, you can request that it go into the parent comment section or addendum, or be added as its own section.

Vision statement template

Print the template on the next page to include in the parent concerns section of your next IEP meeting. You can ask your vision statement be included on the first or second page of the IEP. (For an editable version, you can make a copy of [this document](#).)

Name:



Parent Vision: What does high school/adult life look like for our child?



Age:

Grade:

Parent/Guardian(s):

Siblings:

Pet(s):

Strengths & Loves



-
-
-
-

Student Vision: What goals does our child have for their future?



-
-
-
-

How do I prepare for an IEP meeting?

IEP meeting prep checklist

- Confirm the meeting and let your IEP team know whether you want to record it.
- Request copies of assessments and the draft IEP (or at least draft goals).
- Schedule a check-in with your child's private therapists.
- Write or update the vision statement for your child.
- Review assessments and progress reports, and start a list of your concerns and proposed solutions.
- Think about the goals you want your child to achieve in one year. If you have a draft IEP, consider the goals proposed.
- Think about accommodations, support needs, and placement.
- Consider writing a parental concerns letter or agenda detailing what you want to address in the meeting.
- Consider whether you would like to have someone attend the IEP meeting with you. Let your IEP team know who you'll be bringing and their role (friend, advocate, etc.).
- Gather your documents and complete any last-minute meeting prep.

Make sure you've got all the [essential documents](#) you will need at the meeting. Your IEP team should have copies of these documents days or hours before the meeting.

Checklist: What to bring to the IEP meeting

- Brief summary with your child's strengths, needs, and things they're working on
- Vision statement
- List of concerns
- Relevant correspondence with your school
- Current (last year's) IEP and any addendums, if applicable
- Data you've collected on goal progress, service minutes, and behavior
- Classwork samples
- Independent work samples you've collected
- Progress reports from the current IEP
- Reports from private therapists, doctors, etc.
- District assessments and any independent assessments
- Draft IEP
- Proposed accommodations (optional)
- Proposed changes to IEP goals (optional)
- Yearly progress chart

IEP prep FAQs

Here are several answers to commonly asked questions [to help you get ready for the IEP meeting](#).

Can I record an IEP meeting?

As the parent, you have the right to make an audio recording of an IEP meeting as long as you provide the school district with at least 24 hours' notice. Similarly, the district can record the meeting as long as they provide you with at least 24 hours' notice. (Most districts will choose to record the meeting if the parent asks to record it.)

Should I send a parental concerns letter?

A common question from parents is whether they should send their [list of concerns to the IEP team](#) before the meeting. Undivided Education Advocate Lisa Carey recommends sending an agenda that lists out the items you want to discuss, without going into too much detail. This can be especially helpful for parents who feel they are not being heard or if the school says time is up before getting to all the points of discussion. This will help encourage the school to make time for what the parent wants to cover.

Should I bring someone with me to the meeting?

You don't have to go to the IEP meeting alone! Parents have the option of bringing someone with them, and it doesn't have to be an advocate or attorney. You can bring a friend, family member, partner, or any person who provides you with emotional support. That being said, [hiring an advocate](#) is a helpful way to ensure that your child receives what they are entitled to.

How do I stay calm and focused during the meeting?

It is normal and expected to feel intimidated or uneasy at your child's IEP meeting — but remember that you are a vital member of the IEP team. Own the fact that you possess information about your child that the school does not, such as how your child is doing at home, whether your child has had trouble starting or finishing

homework, or if your child is experiencing anxiety. Although they may be the “experts” in special education, you are always the expert on your child. Let that sink in and allow it to calm you.

Remember to take your time during the IEP meeting and plan a break if you can. It is absolutely okay to ask the team to pause in order to collect your thoughts or find something in your notes during the meeting. [Parental participation](#) is one of the most important parts of the IEP meeting! Plan a break after the meeting is over. As Carey says, one of the most overlooked pieces of IEP prep is planning a time later in the day to unwind, whether that’s going out for coffee, calling your best friend, or taking a bath. If you’re able to take a break after the IEP meeting – do it!

Feeling a little overwhelmed? Don't worry, Undivided is here to help!

Schedule a free Kickstart with a Navigator for support in accomplishing this goal. Get started at [Undivided.io/app/join](https://undivided.io/app/join)



Just scan this QR code!

"Being able to turn to my Undivided Navigator has significantly cut down on the research I need to do."
- Undivided client



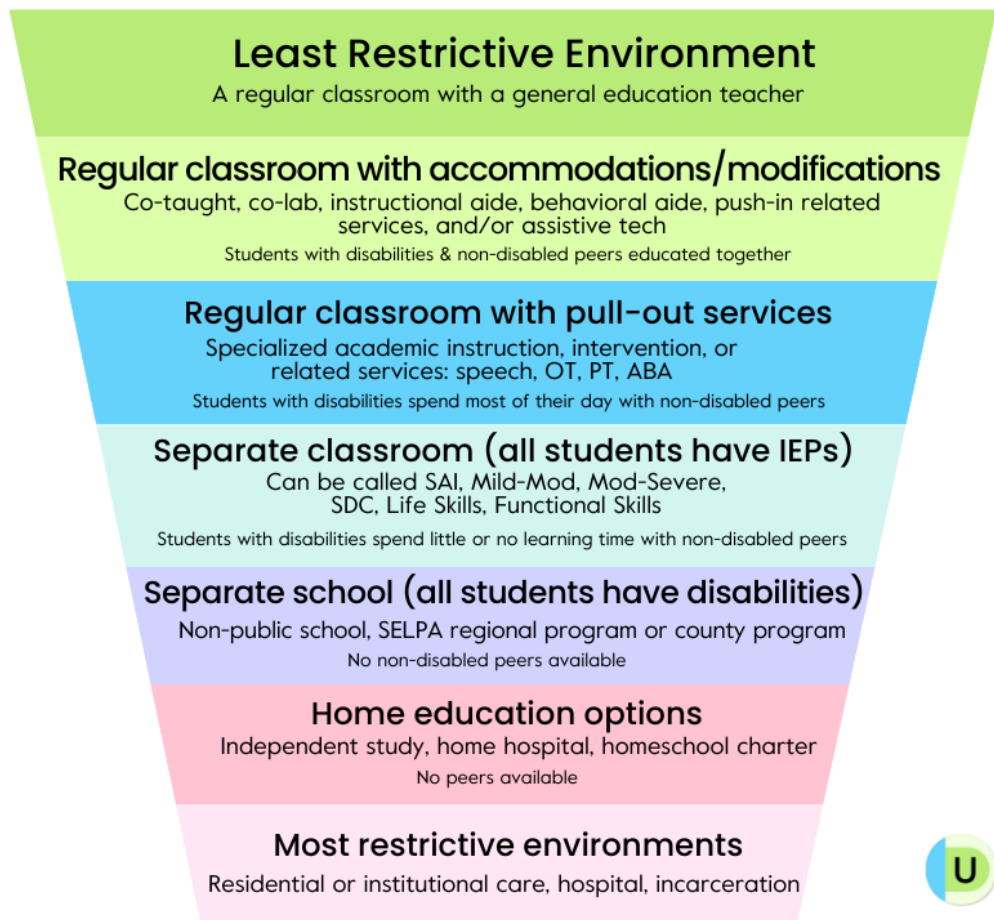
Dive deeper: Key parts of an IEP

Educational placement

One of the most important components of IDEA is the legal requirement that a child be educated in the [least restrictive environment \(LRE\)](#). IDEA also states that students with disabilities are entitled to be educated with students who do not receive special education services, to the maximum extent appropriate.

The district must attempt to make general education work with supplementary services and supports before moving to a more restrictive option. Here are the placements that may be possible in your child’s school district:

Continuum of Educational Placements



A student's placement is decided annually by the IEP team, which includes parents. Older students should also have a say in determining their own placement. Even if a student has been in the same placement year after year, determining a student's placement is a process that must take place every year at the IEP meeting.

What is inclusion?

When we talk about [inclusion](#), we mean making sure our kids with disabilities have plenty of opportunities – in both classrooms and in extracurricular activities – to socialize with their non-disabled peers and having access to their grade-level content. Students don't need to be at grade level; accommodations can be provided to the student, and the curriculum can also be modified to a different but related standard using the same subject matter.

Research shows that inclusive education is linked to better academic results, employment in competitive integrated work, and other indicators of success. Inclusion can be [written into our kids' IEP goals](#) and services.

Top **3** things to know about inclusion in school

1

Inclusive education has been researched for more than 50 years, showing that children with and without disabilities do better academically, socially, and generally in life when participating in inclusive classrooms.



2

Inclusive education does NOT promote lowering the standard of education for other children. It may mean that some students have additional accommodations or modifications to support them in the classroom.



3

Inclusion is not a legal term and is not part of the law, but it is a philosophy about fully belonging to a community. Kids learn to live together in a world that creates a better and safer place for us all.



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IEP goals

Whether they are academic, behavioral, functional, social, or communication-based, IEP goals are one of the most important parts of a student's [IEP](#). There are several reasons for this. Goals – and your child's progress in meeting them – are the tools we use to measure the effectiveness of their IEP. Goals also prioritize the specific skills that your child needs to access the general education curriculum. Finally, goals are the framework that support a child's [placement](#) and services, so they should be appropriately challenging and aligned with a student's strengths, needs, and interests.

So how do we write strength-based IEP goals that do all that and more? Check out our article [A Parent's Guide to IEP Goals](#) to learn more about the six parts of a good goal, how the Common Core State Standards fit in, and more.

IEP goal template



The image shows a screenshot of a worksheet titled "ACADEMIC IEP GOAL PLANNER" with a small "U" logo in the top right corner. The form is divided into several sections: "CHILD" with fields for "NAME", "GRADE", and "DATE"; "VISION STATEMENT"; "GOAL AREA" with checkboxes for "READING", "WRITING", "MATH", and "OTHER....."; "COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD"; a 2x2 grid with "BASELINE" and "STRENGTHS & ABILITIES" in the top row, and "TARGET SKILL" and "SUPPORTS" in the bottom row; and a footer with the URL "undivided.io". There are also small circular icons on the left and right sides of the form.

[Download this PDF](#) to get a goal planner worksheet for both academic and non-academic goals.




Accommodations and modifications

When we build strong IEPs, we focus on creating layers of support at school to ensure that our child receives a free, appropriate public education. Two important tools we can use to make this happen are [accommodations and modifications](#). Simply put, an accommodation adjusts *how* a student learns, while a modification adjusts *what* they learn.

ACCOMMODATIONS VS **MODIFICATIONS**

- ✓ Adjust how a student learns
- ✓ Address how much time they're given to complete work, how they will show content mastery, and what supports they use to access content
- ✓ **Examples:**
 - Listening to an audiobook version of a novel the class is reading
 - Using an aide as a scribe while they dictate their essay
 - Masking half of a math worksheet at a time
 - Completing a shortened math worksheet with the same array of problem types and difficulties

- ✓ Adjust what a student learns
- ✓ Change the expectations for what the student will learn of the grade-level content
- ✓ **Examples:**
 - Reading an abridged version of a novel the class is reading
 - Being assigned an essay that is significantly shorter or about a less complex topic
 - Working on number identification through an assignment that the class is using to work on multiplication

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For some ideas of supports that may help your child access their education, see our [List of Accommodations for IEPs and 504s](#).

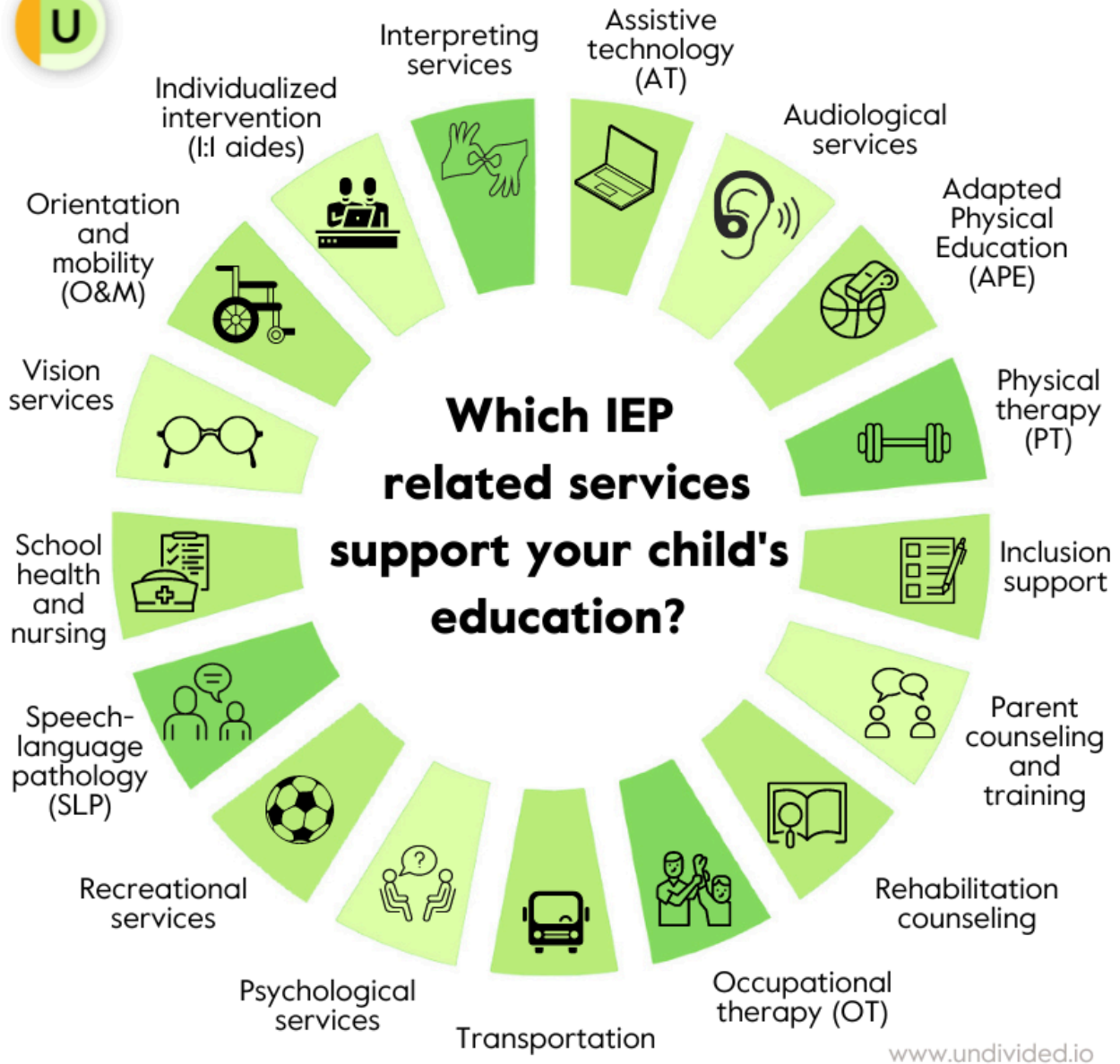
IEP related services

Related services, sometimes also called Designated Instruction and Services (DIS), are the services and specialized supports that a child needs to meet their educational goals. These services and supports are determined by the IEP team and are based on the individual needs of each student.

According to the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) section 300.34, the purpose of related services is to help a child:

- Make progress toward annual IEP goals
- Participate and make progress in the general education curriculum as well as extracurricular and other nonacademic activities
- Be educated alongside and participate with other children with and without disabilities

Related services are listed separately in the IEP from supplementary aids and services, which include things like accommodations and modifications, adaptive equipment, and classroom supports. It's helpful to think of supplementary aids and services as supporting a student in accessing the general education curriculum, while related services support a student in benefiting from special education.



For more details about each of these services, direct vs. consult service, requesting services not listed by IDEA as “related services,” see our article [What Are Related Services in an IEP?](#)

Health and emergency plans in an IEP

While health and emergency plans are not standard parts of the IEP document, the IEP meeting is a good time to bring these topics up with your team.

An [Individualized Health Plan \(IHP\)](#) can be written by the school nurse to document your child's health needs at school, such as medications or dietary needs. It also includes a plan to train staff and protocol to address medical emergencies. The format of an IHP can vary from district to district, so it's recommended to attach the IHP to an IEP or 504 plan.

With your IEP team, it's a good idea to discuss the school's emergency evacuation/lockdown plans and what challenges your child may face related to their disability. An [emergency plan](#) developed by the IEP team can include specific information about the equipment or devices needed, which staff will provide assistance, the procedures to be followed to ensure the student's safety, and any accommodations and related services that support the plan.

You might also consider creating a one-sheet emergency plan for easy reference that communicates your child's primary support needs quickly.

Emergency plan template

Print out the following page for your child's teacher(s).

Emergency Evacuation/Lockdown Plan for _____:

Classroom:

Date:

Items in emergency go-kit	Assistance
Location of go-kit:	Support need: Assigned staff: Backup: Assigned peer: Backup:
Additional equipment needed	Supports for exiting the building
Equipment: Location:	
Building exit location	Go-to meeting point
Classroom ____: Classroom ____: Classroom ____: Backup location:	Classroom ____: Classroom ____: Classroom ____: Backup location:
Lockdown location	Lockdown supports needed

How do I review the IEP?

Before you leave the meeting or shortly after, the district will provide you with the completed IEP document for your review and signature. While reviewing the document, make a note of anything that is inaccurate or doesn't match your understanding.

- Make sure that goals and services are written as they were agreed to in the meeting. Pay particular attention to:
 - Service hours and end dates.
 - Location and frequency of services. For example, will they be provided weekly or monthly? Will they be push-in (services are provided in the classroom) or pull-out (services take place outside of the classroom)?
 - Do the math: if your district lists minutes of time in a SpEd or GenEd class, do they add up to the total minutes you agreed to?
- Check any sections in which you requested changes during a previous meeting that were verbally agreed upon. Tip: If you request any changes during an IEP meeting, ask that they be made in the moment to make sure they don't get left out.
- Look over the accommodations list. Are all the accommodations you agreed to listed?
- Check to be sure extended school year (ESY) services are included, if appropriate for your child, and are in the same educational setting.
- Check health and personal sections. Often, these are copied over from the previous year and become outdated.
- Don't be shy about asking to change any language that presents an inaccurate view of your child. If your IEP team has not added strength-based language to the document, you may request to add it.
- Double-check that all of the concerns and questions you brought up are noted in the IEP. If you recorded the IEP meeting, compare the meeting transcript with what is written in the notes section of the IEP to ensure that the information matches.



Undivided provides 1:1 support and step-by-step guides to help with your child's IEP. Get started at www.undivided.io/app/join.

What if I disagree with the IEP?

If you disagree with the IEP team's assessment, placement, goals, services, or supports, speak up during the IEP meeting. Ask that your objections be included in the narrative or the parent notes.

After the meeting, review your IEP and decide whether to sign it and which parts you agree with. If you agree with some parts but disagree with others, you may want to sign partially so that the parts of the IEP that you agree with can be implemented while you resolve your dispute. (Note that signing partially is permitted in California but not all states.) You can write on the signature page itself what you disagree with and why, if there is room, or you can write a letter of disagreement that you attach to the document. If you attach a letter, make sure to refer to the letter on the signature page; for example, "see attached letter, dated 11/27/2022." By indicating that a letter is attached, you can help ensure that it stays with the IEP document and does not get misplaced.

Once you've determined which components of your child's IEP you disagree with, you can request:

- [a meeting](#) to negotiate with the IEP team or with your special education director
- [an Independent Educational Evaluation](#) (IEE) if you feel new information about your child's abilities will help you negotiate with the IEP team
- [alternative dispute resolution](#) (ADR), which is an informal process that is used to come to an agreement
- mediation, in which a qualified third party will mediate the resolution process
- a [due process](#) hearing, which can also be filed by the district.

If you believe the district is not following federal or state laws and regulations, you may [file a complaint](#) with the state.

How do I make sure the IEP is being followed?

There are several steps you can take to [make sure your child's IEP is being followed](#) and that they are getting the services, accommodations, and focus on goals that the team agreed to.



4 STEPS to make sure your child's IEP is being followed

Review IEP documentation

1

Look at service logs, progress reports, and graded assignments to assess whether accommodations and services are being delivered as written in the IEP.

Speak with service providers and teachers

2

Ask detailed questions about what's being provided and what's working or not working.

Speak with your child

3

Ask about the accommodations and services they're supposed to be receiving.

Request to observe your child's classroom/service session

4

You can send a trusted observer in your place if you worry that your presence would affect your child's behavior.

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Teacher communication log templates

One way to communicate with your child's teachers and providers is by requesting that they fill out a communication log or daily report. Here are some easy templates you can use depending on the information you'd like to request and how often.

Communication Log

Student: _____

Date:	Comments:	Response:
Teacher or provider:		
Class or service:		

Date:	Comments:	Response:
Teacher or provider:		
Class or service:		

Date:	Comments:	Response:
Teacher or provider:		
Class or service:		

Daily Report

Name: _____ Date: _____

Notes:

Morning:	Afternoon:	Activities:
<p>3 things I did today:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.		
<p>What I'm working on:</p>		
<p>Special announcements/reminders:</p>	<p>Notes from home:</p>	

IEP service delivery log template

You can also request that your child’s providers keep detailed track of their service minutes, so you can make sure they’re being provided as written in the IEP.

Date	IEP Service	Minutes of Service Delivered	Duration Specified in IEP	What Worked: (accessibility, accommodations, activities, etc.)	What Didn't Work: (accessibility, accommodations, activities, etc.)	Did it Target IEP Goals?

Make a copy of [this document](#) to get your own editable IEP service delivery log.

About Undivided

Undivided is a parent-driven support system for families raising kids with disabilities. We provide an inclusive community, experienced parent coaches, and expert-backed resources, all organized on our innovative app, to help families get more for their children. Whether you need help accessing Regional Center services, developing an IEP, or finding funding resources for therapies, an Undivided Navigator can walk you through each step with expert-backed answers.



Get started at www.undivided.io/app/join.