

Your Question:

You asked for information on how states address academic expectations in individualized education programs and 504 plans.

Our Response:

[The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) is a federal law that requires states to ensure that free appropriate public education (FAPE) is available to all eligible children with disabilities residing in that state. As a state policy organization, we are not experts on the complex interplay between IDEA, state law and local policy. As such, we are not able to discern how the implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) and 504 plans differs among districts and schools. Below, we have gathered some information on what state guidance generally includes with regard to academic expectations for students with IEPs, state examples pulled from resources on the topic and further resources for your review.

State Guidance

Generally, state and federal guidance on [Individualized Education Programs](#) is more robust than guidance for 504 plans. As a result, many of the resources on this topic are directly related to IEP plans. According to this 2021 [report](#) from the Progress Center at the American Institutes for Research, there has been a shift in the last 10 years from many state education agencies focusing on compliance to results, due in part to the Results Driven Accountability initiative. The [Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District](#) decision in 2016 has placed further focus on achievement — emphasizing that academic progress for students with disabilities is the expectation. The 50-state information included [in this report](#) provides further detail on state guidance in this space:

- At least 26 states reference the Endrew F. decision as a link related to a document, newsletter or presentation and 19 state websites provide some degree of guidance on the impact of Endrew F. on student outcomes and high-quality IEPs.
- Six states (Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Oklahoma and Virginia) defined and gave guidance on Endrew F. directly on state websites.
- Nearly all states provide guidance on statements of current achievement and annual measurable goals in IEPs.

State Examples

This 2019 [report](#) from the Council of Chief State School Officers provides an overview of the various federal laws and court decisions that influence educational services to students with disabilities. In addition to providing background on the topic, CCSSO outlines several opportunities for states to support schools to improve opportunities and outcomes for students with disabilities, including communicating high expectations. This report highlights some state approaches:

- **Kentucky** developed a template for IEPs with guidance documents for various disabilities.

- **Mississippi** discontinued special education diplomas and chose to work with districts to move all students to a general education diploma by aligning the IEP to the expectations in general education.
- **Pennsylvania** provides a state-level annotated IEP for reference.
- **Wisconsin** uses IDEA discretionary grants to support college and career readiness for all students. The state incorporates the concept of ‘high expectations’ into their IEP guidance and all associated training. Additionally, the state implemented a College and Career Ready Individual Education Program (CCR-IEP) that focuses on ambitious goal-setting, rigorous standards and addressing barriers to FAPE.
- **Wyoming** uses a standardized IEP and state guidance to ensure a quality education for students with disabilities. The state education agency provides differentiated supports, technical assistance and monitoring to schools based on a data-driven cohort model.

Further Resources

- [Federal Special Education Guidance is Clear; Now States Must Step Up](#) (Center for Reinventing Public Education, 2020) provides an analysis of the guidance states give to schools and districts in three main categories: 1) interpretation of legal guidance, 2) requiring special education in distance learning plans, and 3) providing educational resources for special education administrators and teachers.
- [Supporting Academic Success](#) (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2017) provides data and information specific to students with learning disabilities and how these students might be best supported to achieve academically.
- [High Expectations and Appropriate Supports: The Importance of IEPs](#) (Office of Special Education Programs — Ideas That Work Symposium, 2018) this event transcript includes information from experts on how to support the development of high-quality IEPs that include high academic expectations for students.