

School Needs – Next Steps

If your child is struggling in school, they may need support through an **IEP (Individualized Education Program)** or a **504 Plan**, here's a clear breakdown of what these are, how to get started, and where to find help.

What's the Difference?

IEP (Individualized Education Program)

- For students who **qualify for special education services** under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Must have a **disability that affects learning** and needs specialized instruction.
- Includes personalized goals, services (e.g., speech therapy), and accommodations.
- Requires formal **evaluation** and eligibility determination.

504 Plan

- For students with a **disability that affects a major life activity**, including learning, but who **do not need specialized instruction**. (I.e. ADHD, depression/anxiety, sensory processing disorder)
- Provides **accommodation** (e.g., extra time on tests, preferential seating) to ensure access to education.
- Covered under **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act**.

Steps to Get Help

1. Document Concerns

- Track your child's academic, behavioral, or social-emotional challenges.
- Save report cards, emails from teachers, testing results, etc.

2. Request an Evaluation

You can **formally request** an evaluation in writing from your child's school. Address to the school principal. Here's a sample line:

"I am requesting a comprehensive educational evaluation for my child to determine eligibility for special education services or a 504 Plan."

- In Minnesota, schools have **30 school days** to complete the evaluation after getting your written consent.

3. Evaluation

The school team (which includes you!) will evaluate your child in areas related to their suspected disability. This might include academic testing, behavioral observation, speech/language assessments, etc.

4. Eligibility Meeting

- If your child **qualifies**, the school will hold a meeting to develop either an **IEP** or a **504 Plan**.
- If they **don't qualify**, you still have the right to appeal

Where to Get Help in Minnesota

PACER Center (Minneapolis-based)

A nationally recognized organization supporting Minnesota families of children with disabilities.

- www.pacer.org
- Call: 952-838-9000
- Free workshops, webinars, and 1-on-1 help <https://www.pacer.org/parent/>

School's Special Education Coordinator

Every school district has a designated special education or 504 coordinator. You can ask the principal or the school office how to contact them. The principal can also be of assistance in getting these processes started.

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

- Special Education Help
 - Due Process Help Line: 651-582-8689
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Accommodations for Tardiness or Absences

If a student is struggling with **tardiness** or **frequent absences**, there are several types of accommodations that can be written into a **504 Plan** or **IEP** to help support their success in school. These are especially helpful for students dealing with **health conditions, anxiety, depression, executive functioning challenges, transportation issues**, or other barriers. Remember there must be a plan in place to address and improve these symptoms or conditions beyond school accommodation.

Instructional Accommodations

- Extended time on assignments or tests missed due to absence.
- Flexible deadlines for homework or projects.
- Access to online materials or recorded lessons.
- Modified workload when returning from absences to reduce overwhelm.
- Use of a "check-in/check-out" system with a trusted adult to re-engage in school after being absent.

Attendance & Schedule Flexibility

- **Excused absences or tardies** related to a diagnosed medical or mental health condition.
- **Late arrival or early dismissal passes** built into the schedule.
- **Flexible scheduling** or reduced day if fatigue or anxiety impacts full-day attendance.
- Option to **attend certain classes virtually** or complete some coursework at home.

Social-Emotional & Executive Function Support

- Daily or weekly check-ins with a counselor or case manager.
- Use of a planner or digital reminders to help with routine.
- Support in developing morning routines or problem-solving barriers to arriving on time.
- Behavior intervention plan (BIP) if tardiness is linked to school avoidance or anxiety.

Classroom Accommodations

- **Non-punitive entry policy** for late arrivals (e.g., no detention or public call-out).
- **Seating near the door** to allow discreet entrance.
- **Access to notes or peer buddy system** for missed content.

Tips for Implementation

- Be **specific** in the plan—note how many absences or tardies are allowed before action is taken.
- Keep the school updated to the medical/therapy plan so things can be adjusted as needed.
- Consider using **data (attendance logs, health records, teacher notes)** to support the need.
- Include a **communication plan** (e.g., parent emails teacher when child is out).

How to Build a Sample List of Accommodations

1. Start With the Student's Needs

Ask:

- What are their strengths and challenges?
- What areas are impacted? (e.g., reading, focus, behavior, sensory regulation, emotional regulation)

2. Match Supports to Barriers

For every challenge, think:

- What could help this student **access the curriculum** like their peers?

3. Use Clear, Specific Language

Accommodations should be practical and easy to implement. Avoid vague phrases like “as needed” unless supported by clear context.

Sample List of Accommodations

These are organized by category—you can copy, paste, or adapt them as needed!

- <https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c267.pdf>
- <https://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c272.pdf>

Attention & Executive Functioning (e.g., ADHD)

- Extended time on tests and assignments
 - Preferential seating close to teacher or away from distractions
 - Use of timers or visual schedules for task management
 - Frequent breaks between tasks
 - Step-by-step instructions or checklists
 - Daily check-in or out to process needs/assignments
 - Use of organizational tools (e.g., planner, color-coded folders)
 - Do not take away physical activities/recess as consequences
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Reading & Learning Disabilities (e.g., Dyslexia, Dysgraphia)

This testing may be done by a licensed psychologist and/or an occupational therapist may be able to help screen if testing is indicated

- Audiobooks or text-to-speech tools
- Read-aloud support for assessments
- Use of graphic organizers for writing
- Reduced or modified assignments
- Use of word processor or speech-to-text software
- Simplified instructions and extra time to process information

Anxiety & Emotional Needs

- Access to a quiet/calming space
 - Breaks as needed for emotional regulation
 - Use of nonverbal cue cards to signal distress
 - Allow oral presentations to be done privately
 - Advanced notice of changes to routine
 - Daily check-in with a trusted adult
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Communication or Speech Challenges

- Allow extra time to respond
 - Use of visuals or AAC (augmentative communication devices)
 - Accept nonverbal responses or gestures
 - Rephrasing questions or instructions
 - Social scripts or role-play practice for communication situations
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Sensory Needs

- Access to fidgets, noise-canceling headphones, or wiggle seats
 - Breaks in a low-stimulation environment
 - Modified lighting or seating to reduce sensory overload
 - Sensory diet breaks built into the day
 - Avoidance of strong smells or loud activities
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Behavioral & Social Challenges

- Clear, consistent routines with visual cues - Try utilizing more non-verbal cues – hand symbols, tap on the shoulder etc.
- Behavior intervention plan (BIP) with goals and supports <https://www.pbisworld.com/tier-2/behavior-intervention-plan-bip/>
- Positive reinforcement and rewards
- Scheduled social skills groups or mentoring
- Support for transitions between activities

Student Accommodation Planning Template:

Student Name: _____

Grade: _____

School Year: _____

Date of Meeting: _____

Areas of Need

General Supports & Notes:

Area of Concern	Specific Challenge/Trigger	Suggested Accommodation/Support	Person Responsible
Academic (e.g., reading, writing)			
Attention/Focus			
Emotional/Behavioral			
Social Skills			
Sensory/Physical Needs			
Communication			

General Supports & Notes:

Schedule Adjustments or Testing Supports:

Support Type	Details
Testing Accommodations	
Schedule Modifications	
Homework/Assignment Adjustments	
Cues	

Check-Ins or Services Needed:

Support/Service	Frequency	Provider
Counseling		
Speech/OT/PT		
Academic Support		

A student might need a **Registered Nurse (RN) care manager** from their **primary care clinic** to get involved with **school troubles** when the issues at school are linked to their **health, mental health, or social circumstances**. Here are some specific situations where this could happen:

Mental Health or Behavioral Issues

- The student is struggling with anxiety, depression, ADHD, or another mental health issue that's impacting attendance, behavior, or academic performance.
- They've had a recent crisis (e.g., self-harm, hospitalization, trauma), and school staff need help coordinating a support plan.

Chronic Medical Conditions

- The student has health conditions like asthma, diabetes, seizures, or severe allergies that aren't well controlled and are causing frequent absences or challenges at school.
- The school needs a **healthcare plan** or education about how to support the student during the day.

Academic Decline Related to Health

- There's a noticeable drop in grades or focus that might be tied to fatigue, medication side effects, sleep problems, etc.
- The student might benefit from 504 accommodations or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) — and the RN can help document medical need.

Social Determinants of Health

- Issues like housing instability, food insecurity, or transportation problems are affecting school attendance or performance.
- The care manager can help connect the family to community resources or social work support.

Care Coordination

- The student sees multiple providers (e.g., a therapist, pediatrician, specialists), and the school is unclear on who to contact or what accommodations are needed.
- The RN can help coordinate communication between providers, family, and school staff (with proper consent).

Other Triggers

- Frequent ER visits or hospitalizations.
- Family is overwhelmed and asks for help navigating school/health needs.