504 Plans, School Rights & Advocacy

A starting guide for Lexington families across disability types. Focus: Massachusetts public elementary and secondary education. Private school and college rules differ.

IEP and Section 504: the essentials

IEP under IDEA	Section 504
Eligibility generally requires an evaluated disability in an IDEA category and a resulting need for special education. An IEP describes individualized goals, instruction, services, and supports.	Section 504 is a civil-rights law. School-service eligibility concerns an impairment substantially limiting a major life activity. Supports are individualized and can include regular or special education and related aids and services, as well as accommodations.

A diagnosis does not automatically decide eligibility or the plan. Good grades do not, by themselves, rule out a disability or a need for support. Discuss learning, communication, attention, health, attendance, behavior, and participation as relevant.

Official explanations: IDEA eligibility • Section 504 school FAQs • Disability discrimination FAQs

Start with your school team

Lexington Public Schools | Contact your child's school; ask who coordinates Section 504.

Describe your concerns in writing and ask about evaluation for special education and/or Section 504 as appropriate. Ask for the applicable process, consent forms, timelines, and procedural safeguards. For existing plans, identify the support that is missing or not working and request a review.

Information & current contact details

Bring to the meeting

Bring a short list of priorities, examples of difficulties and strengths, relevant schoolwork and evaluations, and your child's perspective. Ask: What needs were evaluated? What support is proposed? Who provides it, where, and how often? How will progress or effectiveness be checked? When will we review the plan?

Ask for an interpreter or accessible meeting materials when needed. Keep copies of requests, responses, plans, and meeting notes. School concerns do not have to be resolved through every local step before you seek independent information.

Independent Information & Advocacy

These organizations can help families understand options. Contacting a program does not guarantee representation or an advocate at a meeting.

Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN)

Statewide phone/online help | 800-331-0688 or 617-236-7210 | info@fcsn.org

The Parent Training and Information Center offers free individual assistance with special education questions and free PTI workshops. Ask about eligibility, evaluations, progress, school responsibilities, and options when you disagree. Its website also links to multilingual special education timeline resources.

Information & current contact details

Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC)

Statewide helpline | 617-357-8431 | Contact by phone or through the website

Helpline staff take information about education barriers, assess concerns, and offer guidance, resources, and referrals. A useful starting point for questions about educational rights and access to supports. Ask about current intake, language assistance, and whether further advocacy is available.

Information & current contact details

Disability Law Center (DLC)

11 Beacon Street, Suite 925, Boston, MA 02108 | 617-723-8455

Massachusetts' protection and advocacy organization accepts requests for disability-rights assistance. Its intake page currently lists Tuesday and Thursday, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., with an online form during intake hours. Confirm hours before contacting; ask whether your issue fits current services and priorities.

Information & current contact details

Free and low-cost legal / advocacy directory

Statewide | Bureau of Special Education Appeals forms and publications page

The BSEA publications page includes a directory of free and low-cost legal and advocacy services. Ask each provider about service area, eligibility, capacity, fees, and the kind of help available. Directory inclusion is not a LexSEPTA endorsement.

Information & current contact details

Before hiring an advocate or attorney

Ask about relevant experience, qualifications, fees, written scope, availability, and conflicts of interest. Clarify whether the person is an attorney and what they can do for you. Hiring private help is optional; free information can be a useful first step.

When Concerns Remain Unresolved

Different processes address different issues. Ask the receiving office or a qualified attorney which route applies; these are not a required sequence.

DESE Problem Resolution System (PRS)

135 Santilli Highway, Everett, MA 02149 | 781-338-3700 | DESECompliance@mass.gov

Provides educational-rights information and an impartial complaint process. Investigations and written decisions address alleged noncompliance. Contact PRS about whether it can review your concern, what records to provide, and filing requirements. PRS is not your personal advocate.

Information & current contact details

Bureau of Special Education Appeals (BSEA)

Statewide | Official website has mediation, hearing, forms, and contact information

Offers mediation and due-process procedures involving special education disputes, including eligibility, evaluation, placement, and IEP issues. Its mediation information also addresses Section 504 accommodations. Ask about the appropriate process and applicable rules; mediation and a hearing are different options.

Information & current contact details

BSEA: requesting mediation

U.S. Department of Education: Office for Civil Rights

Federal civil-rights complaint information | Online filing guidance

OCR handles complaints of discrimination within its jurisdiction, including disability discrimination. Its guidance generally calls for filing within 180 calendar days of the alleged discrimination, with possible exceptions. Check current instructions and seek timely advice; other proceedings can affect how a complaint is handled.

Information & current contact details

Keep the record focused

Prepare a dated timeline, the specific concern, relevant requests and responses, the current plan, and the outcome you are seeking. Ask how to send student records securely. Do not assume a local meeting, pending referral, or informal discussion pauses a filing deadline.

Information only, not individual legal advice or an endorsement. Confirm services, eligibility, fees, and current procedures directly. Official sources are linked throughout. Some federal and Mass.gov pages were available only through official indexed listings during review.

More LexSEPTA family resources