

Special Education Abbreviations Every Parent Should Know

Special education can feel like a whole new language! Here's a quick-reference guide to help you decode common terms and feel more confident in meetings.

Abbreviation	What It Means	What It Is
IEP	Individualized Education Program	A legal plan tailored to meet a student's unique learning needs.
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act	The federal law that guarantees services and rights for students with disabilities.
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education	The right to a free and appropriate education, tailored to the student's needs.
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment	The setting where a student can learn with peers to the greatest extent possible.
PWN	Prior Written Notice	A written explanation the school must give before changing or refusing services.
PLAAFP	Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance	A detailed summary of how the student is currently doing in school.
BIP	Behavior Intervention Plan	A plan to address challenging behaviors using positive strategies.
FBA	Functional Behavioral Assessment	A process for identifying the cause of problem behaviors.
RTI	Response to Intervention	Early support for struggling students before considering special education.



Special Education Abbreviations (continued)

Abbreviation	What It Means	What It Is
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	A civil rights law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination.
ESY	Extended School Year	Special education services provided beyond the regular school year.
SLP	Speech-Language Pathologist	A professional who supports students with speech, language, and communication needs.
OT	Occupational Therapy	Helps students with fine motor skills, sensory needs, and daily tasks.
PT	Physical Therapy	Supports movement, balance, and physical access to learning environments.
AT	Assistive Technology	Tools or devices that help a student access the curriculum.
LEA	Local Education Agency	Your local school district—usually represented at the IEP meeting by a district staff member.
SEA	State Education Agency	The state’s department of education that oversees and enforces special education laws.
IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation	An evaluation conducted by a qualified professional not employed by the school district. Parents can request an IEE at public expense if they disagree with the school's evaluation.

