THE #FKLM FAMILY BLUEPRINT

# Understanding School Supports and Accommodations

Educational & Scholarship Pathways · School Success

*Plain-language overview of the support plans schools use and how families can ask about them.*

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*Print, write on it, and share it with the people helping your family.*

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> *Plain-language overview of the support plans schools use and how families can ask about them.*

## THE DIFFERENCE THIS MAKES

Most families first hear the words "support plan" during a crisis — after a failing quarter, a suspension, or a teacher saying a child cannot focus. By then the family is reacting under pressure and the options feel narrow.

Schools generally have a range of supports available long before that point, and many of them require nothing more than an adult asking. Others involve a formal evaluation process with legal timelines. Families rarely know the difference, so they either ask for nothing or ask for the most formal thing available when something simpler would have worked faster.

Family separation, a parent's incarceration, a household move, and grief all affect learning — including for students who test well and have never had an academic problem. This lesson explains what generally exists, how to ask, and what to expect, in plain language. Specific rules and names vary by state and district; the school itself is the authority on its own process.

## THE INFORMAL LAYER, WHICH IS FASTER THAN PEOPLE THINK

Before any formal plan exists, most schools can offer things a teacher or counselor can arrange in a single conversation: a seat change, a weekly check-in with a trusted adult, extra time on a specific assignment, access to tutoring or a homework club, a pass to leave class briefly when overwhelmed, or a quiet place to take a test.

None of that requires an evaluation. It requires a specific request to a specific person. Vague requests — "can he get some help" — tend to dissolve; concrete ones — "can he have a weekly ten-minute check-in with the counselor on Mondays" — tend to happen.

Ask for informal support first when the problem is recent and tied to a change at home. It can be in place next week, while a formal process takes longer.

## THE FORMAL LAYER, AND HOW IT GENERALLY STARTS

Schools also have formal plans that follow federal and state rules. Two are common across the United States: a plan that provides accommodations for a student with a disability that affects a major life activity,

and a special-education plan for a student who qualifies for specialized instruction. Districts use different names and different forms, and eligibility is decided by the school team, not by a website.

What is consistent almost everywhere is how the process starts: a written request from a parent or caregiver asking the school to evaluate the student. Written matters, because timelines in most states begin from the date the school receives the request.

You do not need a diagnosis to request an evaluation, and you do not need to know which plan you are asking about. The request can simply describe what you are seeing and ask the school to determine whether an evaluation is appropriate.

## + WHAT TO SAY YOU ARE SEEING

Schools act on specifics. "He's struggling" is a feeling; "he's gone from B's to D's in math since October, he says he can't concentrate, and he's been falling asleep in third period" is data a team can respond to.

Useful details include changes in grades and when they started, homework that takes far longer than it should, comments the student makes about a specific class, sleep and appetite changes, avoidance of school, and anything a teacher has mentioned in passing.

You can describe the impact of a household change without describing the change itself: "there was a significant disruption at home in September and his schoolwork has not recovered since" gives the school what it needs to act.

## + EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT IS PART OF THIS

Support plans are not only academic. Many schools can connect a student with a school counselor, a school social worker, a school psychologist, or a community mental-health partner that works on campus, often at no cost to the family.

Behavior that looks like defiance is frequently distress. When a student's discipline record changes suddenly, that is worth naming to the school as a possible signal rather than a character issue — and worth asking whether a behavior support plan or counseling referral is appropriate.

Ask what the school already has available before assuming you need to find something outside. Many districts have more on campus than families realize.

## + KEEPING A PLAN ALIVE AFTER IT EXISTS

A plan on paper is not a plan in practice. Ask two follow-up questions at the meeting where anything is agreed: who is responsible for making sure each teacher knows, and when will we check whether it is working.

Put a reminder on your own calendar six weeks out. If nothing has changed by then, email the counselor with the specific accommodation and ask whether it is being implemented. That email is usually enough to restart it.

Also ask what happens if the student changes schools. Plans generally travel with a student's records, but the receiving school needs to know they exist — which is why families should keep their own photographed copy.

## + ASKING EARLY INSTEAD OF AFTER THE REPORT CARD

A grandmother noticed her 15-year-old granddaughter, previously a strong student, had stopped turning in work in two classes about a month after a change in the household. Nothing had been flagged by the school yet.

She emailed the counselor with specifics: which classes, when it started, that homework now took three hours, and that there had been a major disruption at home. She asked two things — whether informal supports could start immediately, and whether the school recommended a formal evaluation.

The counselor set up a weekly check-in and a homework-club referral within a week. The school also scheduled a team meeting to discuss whether more was needed. The informal support closed most of the gap before the formal question was ever resolved.

## + WORDS YOU CAN USE

**Asking for informal support this week**

*Email to a counselor when a recent change is affecting school.*

*"Hi Ms. _____, _____ has had a significant change at home since _____ and I'm seeing it in his schoolwork — specifically _____. Before we talk about anything formal, are there supports the school can start now? I'm thinking of a weekly check-in with a trusted adult and access to tutoring, but I'd welcome your suggestions."*

**Written request for an evaluation**

*Send by email to the counselor and principal. Keep a dated copy.*

*"I am writing to formally request that the school evaluate _____ (grade __, DOB __/__/____) to determine whether she is eligible for support services. I am seeing the following: _____. Please confirm receipt of this request in writing and let me know the next steps and the timeline. Thank you."*

**Following up when a plan isn't happening**

*Use about six weeks after any support is agreed to.*

*"Hi Ms. _____, we agreed on _____ back in _____. I want to check whether it's happening day to day, because _____ hasn't mentioned it. Could you confirm with his teachers and let me know? Happy to help however is useful."*

**Asking a school what it already offers**

*For a first conversation, before you know what to request.*

*“I'd like to understand what's available at this school before I ask for anything specific. What supports exist for a student who is struggling — academically or emotionally — and which of those can start without a formal process?”*

## + BEFORE YOU ASK FOR SUPPORT

- [ ] Write down what you are seeing: which classes, when it started, how it shows up.
- [ ] Ask the school what informal supports can begin immediately.
- [ ] Decide whether to describe the household change or only its impact.
- [ ] Put any evaluation request in writing and keep a dated copy.
- [ ] Ask who will tell each teacher about any agreed accommodation.
- [ ] Set a six-week reminder to check whether the support is actually happening.
- [ ] Photograph every plan document and store it with your school records.

## + REFLECT AND WRITE

**What specifically have I noticed changing, and when did it start?**

**What is one support I could ask for that would help this month?**

**Who at the school is most likely to say yes?**

## + YOUR NEXT STEP

Write down one specific concern to raise at the next school contact.

## + WHERE THIS COMES FROM

Source: U.S. Department of Education — IDEA — verified August 2026. Curated and summarized by MFGP.
*https://www.ed.gov/laws-and-policy/individuals-disabilities/idea*
*This is general information and practice guidance — not legal advice, mental-health treatment, or a statement of any court, agency, or facility's rules. Policies differ by state, county, facility, school, and program, so always confirm details with the office involved.*
*For decisions with legal, medical, financial, or clinical consequences, work with a licensed professional or the organizations listed with each resource.*

*You do not have to do this alone.*

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