Parent’s Guide to IEP Rights in California

A family-friendly overview of important special education protections. This is general information, not legal advice. Requirements can vary by situation; check current law and official notices.

Core rights to know

Topic	What families should know
Evaluation and eligibility	Parents may request an evaluation when they suspect a disability affects educational access. Schools must follow applicable evaluation and consent procedures.
Parent participation	Parents are members of the IEP team and should have a meaningful opportunity to participate in decisions.
Free appropriate public education (FAPE)	Eligible students are entitled to special education and related services designed to provide FAPE.
Least restrictive environment (LRE)	Placement decisions should consider education with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate, with needed supports.
Prior written notice (PWN)	The district generally must provide written notice when it proposes or refuses certain changes concerning identification, evaluation, placement, or FAPE.
Independent educational evaluation (IEE)	If parents disagree with a district evaluation, they may request an IEE at public expense, subject to legal procedures.
Records and progress	Families can request access to educational records and review how IEP goals and services are being implemented.
Disagreements	Options may include facilitated discussion, mediation, state complaint procedures, or due process, depending on the issue.

Before or after an IEP meeting

- Put requests and concerns in writing and keep dated copies.
- Ask what data supports a proposed decision, including progress, assessments, and service delivery records.
- Request that the team document decisions, agreed next steps, and any areas of disagreement.
- Review the proposed IEP carefully and ask questions before providing consent.

Questions I can ask

What specific need does this service or support address?

How will progress be measured, reported, and reviewed?

What alternatives were considered, and why were they accepted or rejected?

Official sources for current information

California Department of Education, Special Education: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/

U.S. Department of Education, IDEA regulations: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/

California Office of Administrative Hearings, Special Education:
https://www.dgs.ca.gov/OAH/Case-Types/Special-Education

For timelines and dispute procedures, consult the current procedural safeguards notice and applicable California and federal law.