GALT ADVOCACY

BACK-TO-SCHOOL FAMILY GUIDE

2026 - 2027

A practical California guide for families of students with IEPs, 504 Plans, or suspected disabilities.

Start organized. Stay informed. Keep the plan individualized.

Use this guide to prepare your child, connect with the school team, check implementation, and document concerns early.

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WELCOME

A strong start begins before day one

A new school year can bring new teachers, routines, services, and expectations. For a student with a disability, a thoughtful transition can reduce uncertainty and help the IEP or 504 Plan work as intended from the first day.

Use this guide in three stages
BEFORE SCHOOL: organize and share essential information.
FIRST TWO WEEKS: confirm services and observe the transition.
ONGOING: track progress, communicate in writing, and reconvene the team when needed.

Your four back-to-school priorities

- ☐ Organize yourchild's educationaland healthinformation.
- ☐ Prepare to collaborate with teachers, providers, and administrators. Prepare
- ☐ your child for the people, places, schedule, and sensory demands. Monitor
- ☐ whether the agreed-upon plan is actually being implemented.

Keep the focus on access
Ask whether supports allow meaningful involvement, progress, safety, communication, and participation with peers.

1 | GET ORGANIZED

Before-school checklist

Review the current plan

- ☐ Readthe IEPor504 Planfrombeginning to end.
- ☐ Confirm placement, services, frequency, duration, location, group size, and start dates.
- ☐ Review accommodations, behavior supports, health plans, transportation, and assistive technology.
- ☐ Compare eachannualgoal withthe most recent progress report.

Gather key information

- ☐ Currentevaluations, privatereports, and relevant medical orders.
- ☐ Emergency contacts, allergies, medication instructions, and safety information.
- ☐ A student snapshot: strengths, interests, communication, stress signs, and effective supports.
- ☐ Important emails, prior written notices, work samples, and unresolved requests.

Create one working folder

Suggested sections: Current IEP/504 | Assessments | Progress | Communication | Health and Safety | Behavior Data | Work Samples. Keep a contact log with date, person, topic, response, and next step.

IEP and 504 readiness review

PRESENT LEVELS
Do they describe current academic and functional needs?

MEASURABLE GOALS
Does each goal have a baseline, observable skill, measurement method, criterion, and reporting schedule?

SERVICES
Are provider, frequency, minutes, group size, location, and dates clear?

ACCOMMODATIONS
Are supports specific enough for consistent implementation?

BEHAVIOR AND SAFETY
Are prevention, teaching, response, data collection, and crisis procedures documented?

PROGRESS MONITORING
Does the plan say how progress will be measured and reported?

A practical implementation question
"If I visited during the hardest part of my child's day, what would I see staff doing to implement this plan?"

Build a clear communication pathway

Confirm the people and the plan

- [ ] Teacher(s),case manager,providers, administrator, nurse, transportation contact, and behavior support staff.
- [ ] Daily schedule, including service times, transitions, lunch/recess, and transportation.
- [ ] The school communication platform and best method for time-sensitive concerns.
- [ ] How substitute staff and multiple teachers will access necessary supports and safety information.

Make communication useful

Be specific, factual, and student-centered. Describe what happened, the educational impact, what the current plan requires, and the response you are requesting. Confirm important conversations by email.

A weekly check-in can track

- [ ] Attendance and successful arrival
- [ ] Services delivered or missed
- [ ] Progress toward priority goals Behavior,
- [ ] regulation, or safety patterns Work
- [ ] completion and level of support Peer
- [ ] participation and belonging

4 | REDUCE UNCERTAINTY

Prepare your child for the transition

Preview the day

- [ ] Visitthe campus, classroom, or key locations when possible.
- [ ] Preview photos of staff, entrances, bathrooms, cafeteria, quiet spaces, and pickup areas.
- [ ] Practice morning, transportation, and after-school routines.
- [ ] Useavisualschedule, calendar, social narrative, or short video preview.

Plan for access

- [ ] Packrequiredsupports such as headphones, fidgets, communication tools, or adapted supplies.
- [ ] Identify a trusted adult and a clear way to request help, a break, food, water, or the bathroom.
- [ ] Plan for sensory needs, fatigue, meals, medication, and recovery time after school.
- [ ] Invite your child to identify goals, worries, and what staff should know.

Support self-advocacy
Practice short scripts: "I need the directions in writing." "May I use my break?" "I do not understand." The student should not carry the full burden of enforcing the plan.

Monitor implementation and progress

WEEK 1	Confirm schedule, transportation, health and safety procedures, and essential supports.
WEEK 2	Confirm related services have begun and accommodations are used across settings.
WEEKS 3-4	Review early data, work samples, attendance, behavior patterns, and goal progress.
BY DAY 30	Decide whether routine monitoring is enough or the team needs to revise the plan.

Early warning signs

- ☐ Serviceshavenot startedor are repeatedly missed.
- ☐ Accommodations are treated as optional or dependent on student request.
- ☐ Frequent removals, early pickups, shortened days, restraint, seclusion, or informal exclusions.
- ☐ A sharp increase in refusal, elopement, shutdown, aggression, anxiety, fatigue, or physical
- ☐ complaints. Little or no data is available to show or explain progress.

PUT IMPORTANT REQUESTS IN WRITING

California timeline quick reference

5 business days	Access to copies of student records after an oral or written parent request. *Cal. Educ. Code section 56504*
15 calendar days	Generally, an assessment plan after a referral, subject to school-break rules. *Cal. Educ. Code sections 56043(a), 56321(a)*
60 calendar days	Generally, assessments and an IEP after written consent, subject to exceptions. *Cal. Educ. Code sections 56043(c), (f), 56344*
30 days	Generally, a parent-requested meeting to review an existing IEP, excluding specified school breaks. *Cal. Educ. Code section 56343.5*
At least annually	The IEP team reviews and revises the IEP as appropriate. *34 C.F.R. section 300.324(b)*

Important
Timelines can have exceptions. This guide is general educational information, not legal advice. Review current law and individual circumstances before relying on a deadline.

CLEAR, SPECIFIC, WRITTEN

Ready-to-use email templates

INTRODUCTION

Subject: [Student] - Back-to-School Information

Hello [Name], I am [parent/guardian] of [student]. I am sharing a student snapshot and the current IEP/504 Plan. The most important supports for a successful start are [list]. Please confirm the best communication method and whom I should contact regarding [topic].

REQUEST AN IEP MEETING

Subject: Written Request for IEP Meeting - [Student]

I am requesting an IEP team meeting to review [concerns]. Please treat this as my written request under California Education Code section 56343.5. I would like the team to discuss [topics] and consider [data/documents]. Please send proposed dates and times.

CONFIRM IMPLEMENTATION

Subject: Follow-Up Regarding [Service/Support]

My understanding is that [plan provision] requires [support]. On [dates], [factual observation]. Please confirm whether and how the provision is being implemented, provide relevant service or progress data, and identify the plan to address missed support.

FILLABLE STUDENT SNAPSHOT

Get to know my child

CHILD'S FULL AND PREFERRED NAME

AGE, GRADE, AND SCHOOL

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONTACT

STRENGTHS, INTERESTS, AND TALENTS

HOW MY CHILD COMMUNICATES

HOW MY CHILD LEARNS BEST

IMPORTANT PEOPLE, ACTIVITIES, OR MOTIVATORS

FILLABLE STUDENT SNAPSHOT

Supports that help my child

AREAS WHERE SUPPORT IS NEEDED

ACCOMMODATIONS AND STRATEGIES THAT WORK

EARLY SIGNS OF STRESS, OVERLOAD, OR ESCALATION

IF MY CHILD IS STRUGGLING, PLEASE TRY

HEALTH, SAFETY, SENSORY, OR ACCESS INFORMATION

WHAT MY CHILD WANTS THE TEAM TO KNOW

USE THROUGHOUT THE FIRST MONTH

Back-to-school action log

DATE / CONTACT / TOPIC / RESPONSE / NEXT STEP 1

DATE / CONTACT / TOPIC / RESPONSE / NEXT STEP 2

DATE / CONTACT / TOPIC / RESPONSE / NEXT STEP 3

DATE / CONTACT / TOPIC / RESPONSE / NEXT STEP 4

DATE / CONTACT / TOPIC / RESPONSE / NEXT STEP 5

DATE / CONTACT / TOPIC / RESPONSE / NEXT STEP 6

CALIFORNIA AND FEDERAL

Trusted resources

Galt Advocacy - Educational and IEP Advocacy
www.galtadvocacy.com/services/educational-iep-advocacy

California Department of Education - Special Education
www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se

California OAH - Notice of Procedural Safeguards
www.dgs.ca.gov/OAH/Case-Types/Special-Education/Resources/Page-Content/Special-Education-R

Disability Rights California - Special Education Rights and Responsibilities
serr.disabilityrightsca.org

U.S. Department of Education - IDEA Regulations
sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b

Parent Training and Information Centers - California
www.parentcenterhub.org/california

Understood - Back-to-School Resources
www.understood.org/en/topics/back-to-school

California Content Standards
www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss

Need individualized support?
Galt Advocacy assists California families with records review, IEP preparation and meetings, goals and services, assessments, behavior supports, parent participation, and dispute-resolution strategy.

Call (707) 566-7600 or visit galtadvocacy.com.