NC InCK

NC INTEGRATED CARE FOR KIDS

Integrated Care Rounds: Supporting Families in the School System

March 12, 12:00-1:00 PM

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Grounding for All InCK ICRs & Echos

- **Respect for All:** *There will be topics, situations, or maybe even resources that you as a person have various feelings about. We ask that in these spaces, we all show respect for all, by being supportive, caring, and professional.*
- **Take 2 and Pause:** *Discussion and hearing from you is so powerful, and what we strive for in these spaces. We ask that if you have shared twice, take a pause, to encourage colleagues to take the floor and share as well.*
- **Questions Encouraged:** *If you have a questions please ask, in most cases someone has the same one. Be BOLD and PROUD, ask it! You are always welcome to private chat questions to any member of our team.*
- **Play, Learn, Grow:** *Just like Fisher Price, we want you to enjoy this learning space, learn and grow from/with each topic!*



NC InCK NC INTEGRATED CARE FOR KIDS

Navigating EC, IEP & 504 Plans in North Carolina for Students with Disabilities

A Practical Guide for Care Providers Supporting Students with Disabilities and Families

Kristen Southworth
Durham Advocates for Exceptional Children

Understanding Special Education

Exceptional Children (EC)

North Carolina's term for **special education services** provided to students whose disability impacts their educational performance. EC services are governed by federal law (IDEA) and may include specialized instruction and related services.

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)

The **federal special education law** that governs:

- Eligibility for special education
- Evaluation requirements
- IEP development
- Procedural safeguards
- Parent rights



IDEA is what gives IEPs their legal structure and protections.

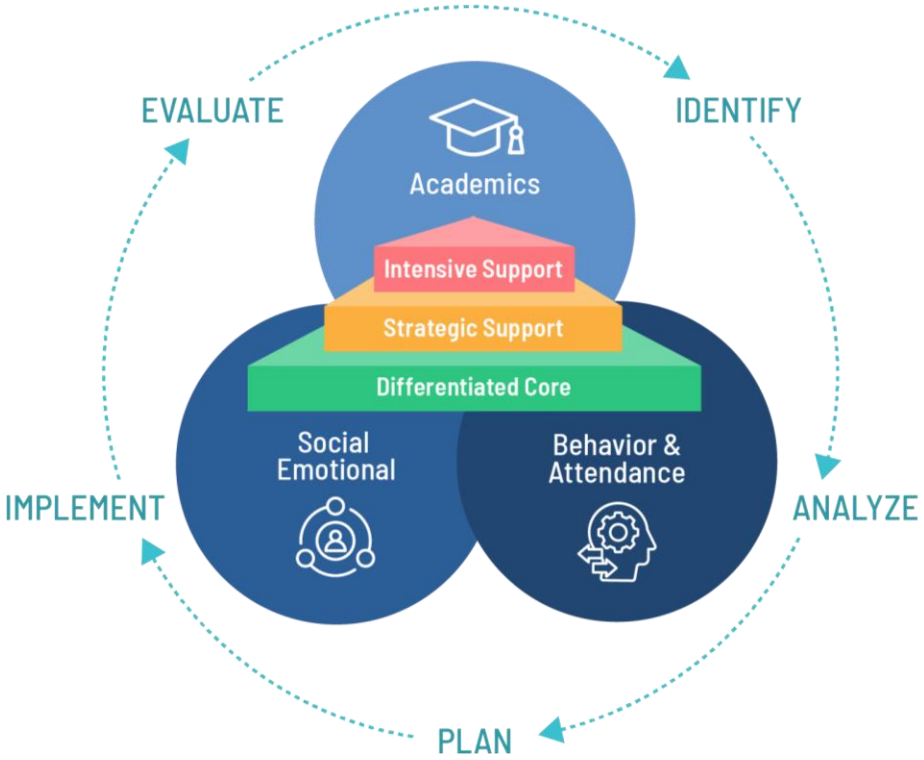
Supporting **ALL** Students
North Carolina's Support Model

MTSS
(Multi-Tiered System of Support)

A **general education framework** used to provide increasing levels of intervention:

- Tier 1 – Core instruction for all students
- Tier 2 – Targeted small group interventions
- Tier 3 – Intensive interventions

MTSS is NOT special education, but it may lead to a referral for evaluation if concerns persist.



The MTSS process includes ALL children within the school. Used to determine the level of support, including Academically Gifted instruction.

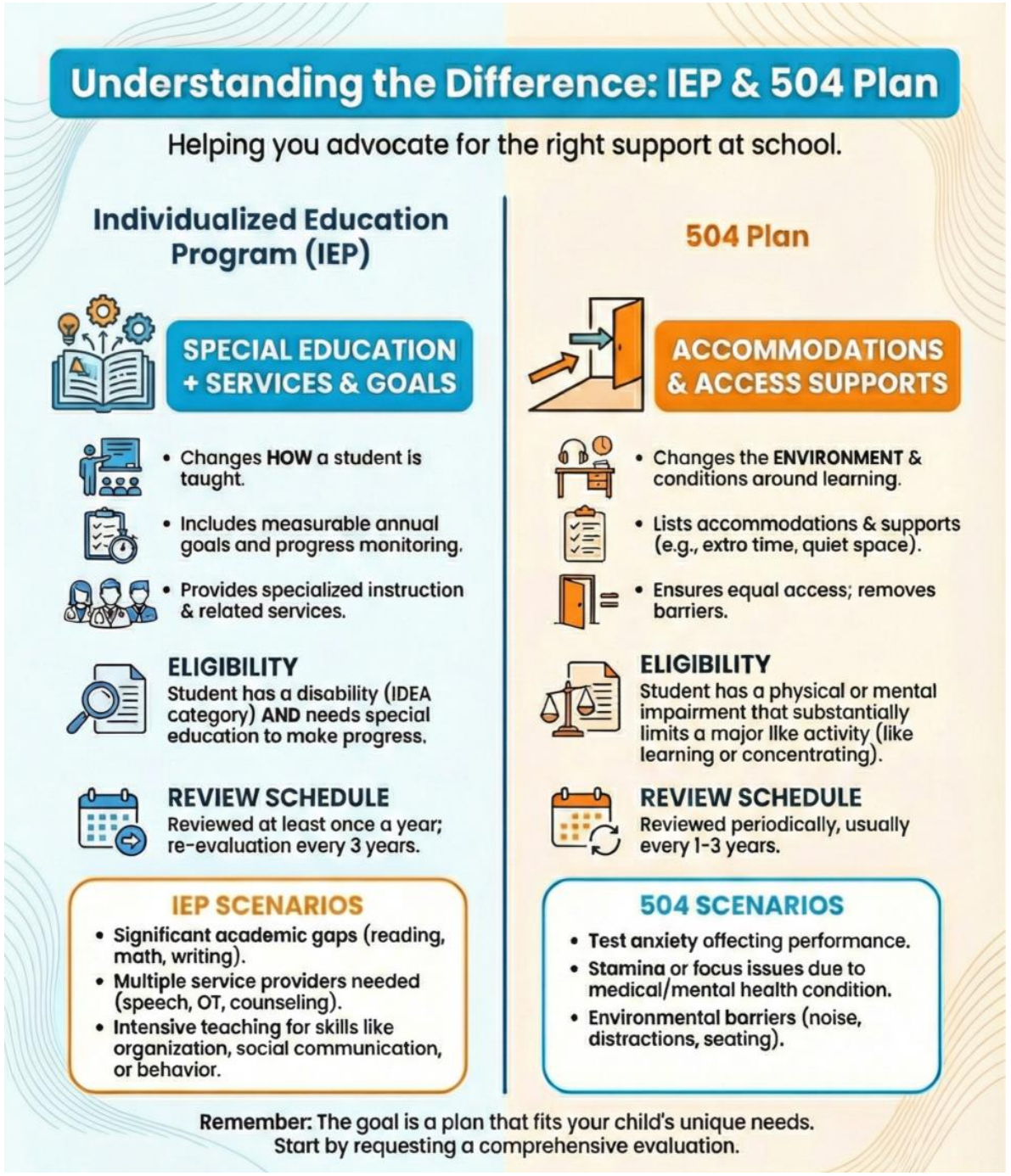
While the process is intended to provide varied levels of support, MTSS can also delay the receipt of evaluations.

IEP and 504 Plans are both formal educational support plans for students with disabilities.

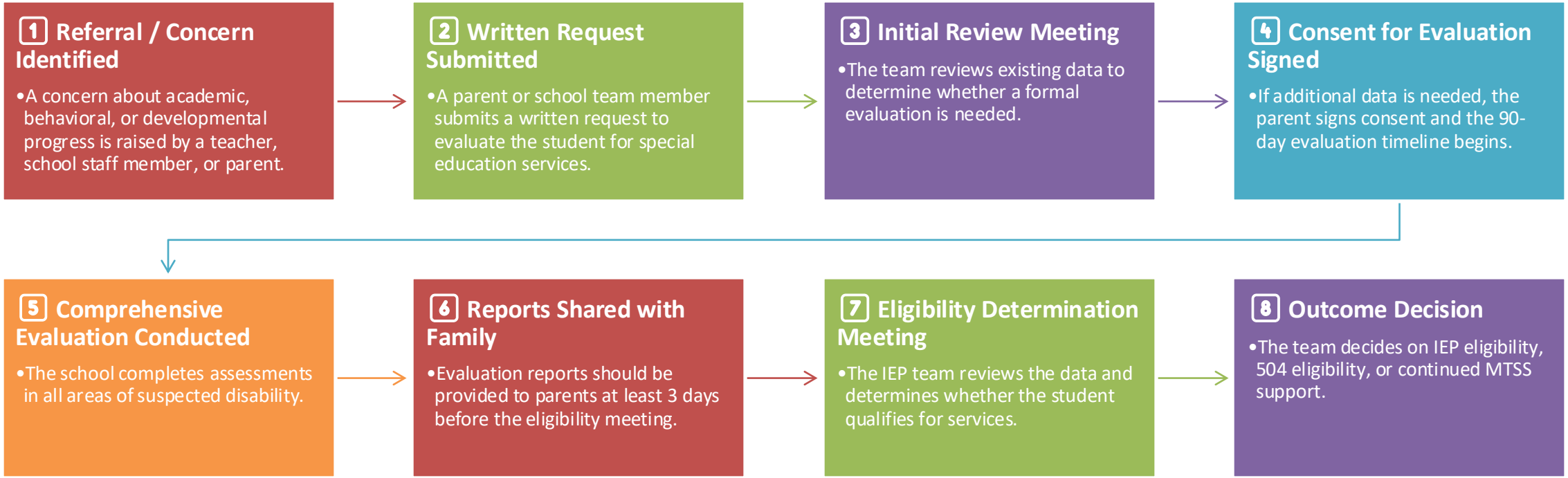
…both legally recognized

…both disability-based educational plans.

…both school-based plans designed to support students with disabilities.



Steps for Requesting Evaluation



How the IEP Process Is Initiated

Who Can Initiate a Referral?

A recommendation for evaluation can come from:



A classroom teacher



School administration



School-based testing or benchmark data



Behavioral concerns



A parent or caregiver

Important:

Parents and caregivers have the right to request an evaluation at **any time**.

Where to Start…..

STEP 1: The request should be made in writing (email counts).

Send to:

- ❖Principal
- ❖School EC Case Manager
- ❖School Psychologist



Include clear language such as:

“I am requesting a comprehensive evaluation to determine eligibility for special education services.”

Written requests create accountability and documentation.

What Next.....

Schools are required to respond **without unnecessary delay** …

Step 2:
Initial Meeting to Review Concerns

A meeting is scheduled to:

- ✓ Review the request
- ✓ Examine existing data
- ✓ Determine whether additional evaluation is needed

At this meeting, the team typically reviews:

- ✓ Benchmark and testing data
- ✓ Classroom performance
- ✓ Teacher observations
- ✓ Behavioral data
- ✓ MTSS intervention history and progress

Step 3:
Consent for Evaluation

If the team determines more information is needed:

- ✓The parent is asked to sign a Consent for Evaluation form
- ✓The team identifies which areas will be evaluated
- ✓The **90-day timeline** begins when consent is signed.

Steps to Determining “Eligibility”

Step 3: Consent for Evaluation

- If the team determines that more information is needed….
- The parent is asked to sign a Consent for Evaluation form
- The team identifies which areas will be evaluated
- The 90-day timeline begins when consent is signed.

Step 4: Comprehensive Evaluation

Evaluations may include:

- Academic achievement testing
- Cognitive (intellectual) assessment
- Speech and language evaluation
- Social-emotional/behavioral assessment
- Executive functioning assessment
- Adaptive behavior assessment
- Autism-specific assessment (if suspected)
- Occupational therapy (OT) evaluation
- Physical therapy (PT) evaluation
- Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA), if behavior is a major concern

Evaluations must assess all areas of suspected disability.

Step 5: Review of Evaluation Reports

- Parents/caregivers should receive a copy of the school psychologist’s report at least **3 days prior** to the eligibility determination meeting.
- This allows families time to review findings and prepare questions.

Step 6: Eligibility Determination Meeting

At this meeting:

- The evaluation results are reviewed
- The team discusses whether sufficient data exists
- The team determines next steps

The team must determine:

- Does the student have a qualifying disability under IDEA?
- Does the disability adversely impact educational performance?
- Does the student require specialized instruction?

All three must be “yes” for IEP eligibility.

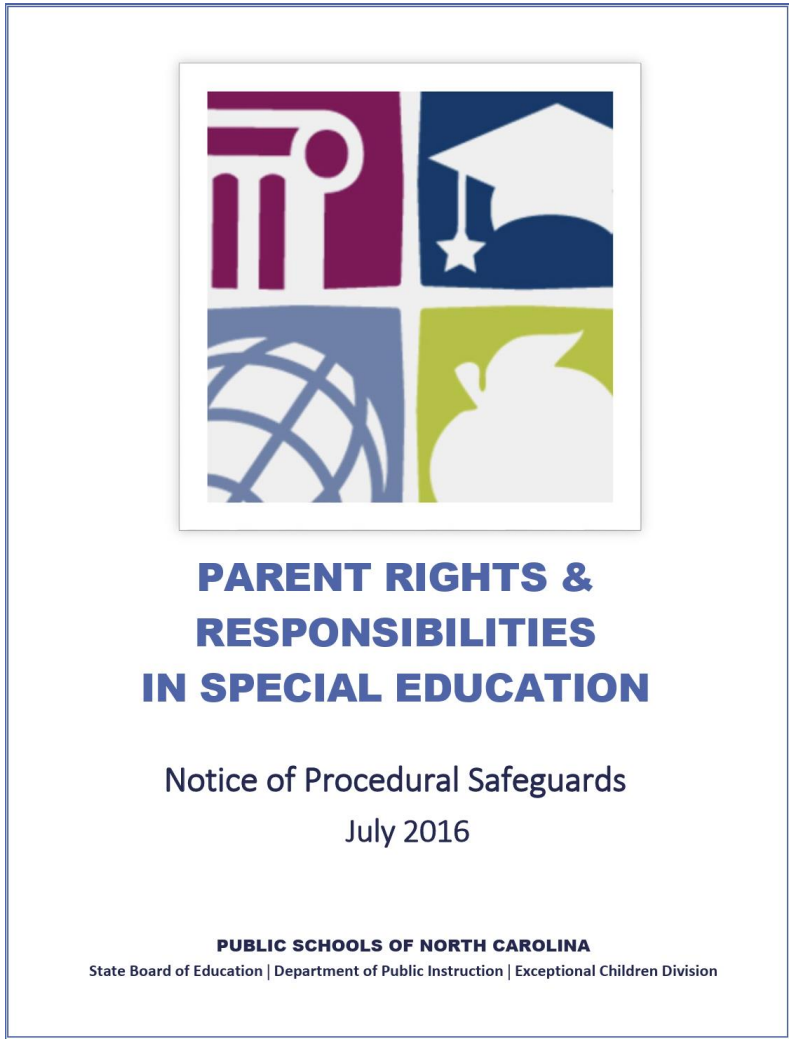
Parent Rights in North Carolina

Parents of students with disabilities have important legal protections under IDEA.

Parent Rights in NC Include:

- ✓ Request evaluation at any time
- ✓ Receive Prior Written Notice
- ✓ Consent before evaluation/services
- ✓ Comprehensive evaluation
- ✓ Reports 3 days before the meeting
- ✓ Equal IEP team participation
- ✓ Request Independent Evaluation
- ✓ Access dispute resolution options

NC DPI Exceptional Children Parent Rights Procedural Safeguards



Common Issue & Concerns



Red Flags to Listen For…

These statements may signal the need for deeper review:

- "Let's wait and see." (after repeated concerns)
- "They're just not trying."
- "It's probably behavioral." (without academic data reviewed)
- "We don't test for that."
- "They don't qualify, but we can do a 504 instead."
- "They're too smart to have a learning disability."
- "We don't have enough data yet." (after long intervention history)

System Patterns to Be Aware Of…

In many districts (statewide and nationally), patterns may include:

- Extended MTSS without formal referral
- Behavior addressed before academic skill gaps
- Reading disabilities under-identified
- Students of color are disproportionately disciplined
- 504 plans are offered when specialized instruction may be needed
- Families feel pressured to agree during meetings

When English Is Not the Family's First Language

Families who are multilingual may face additional barriers in the EC process.

Common Challenges

- Reports provided only in English
- Meetings held without qualified interpreters
- Complex educational jargon
- Consent signed without full understanding
- Cultural differences in communication

Legal Protections

Under IDEA and federal civil rights law, families have the right to:

- A qualified interpreter at meetings
- Important documents in their native language (when feasible)
- Informed consent — meaning full understanding before signing
- Schools cannot rely on students or untrained staff to interpret.

How to Help Prepare Families

- Confirm preferred language
- Encourage interpreter requests in advance
- Ensure families understand before signing
- Normalize asking for clarification

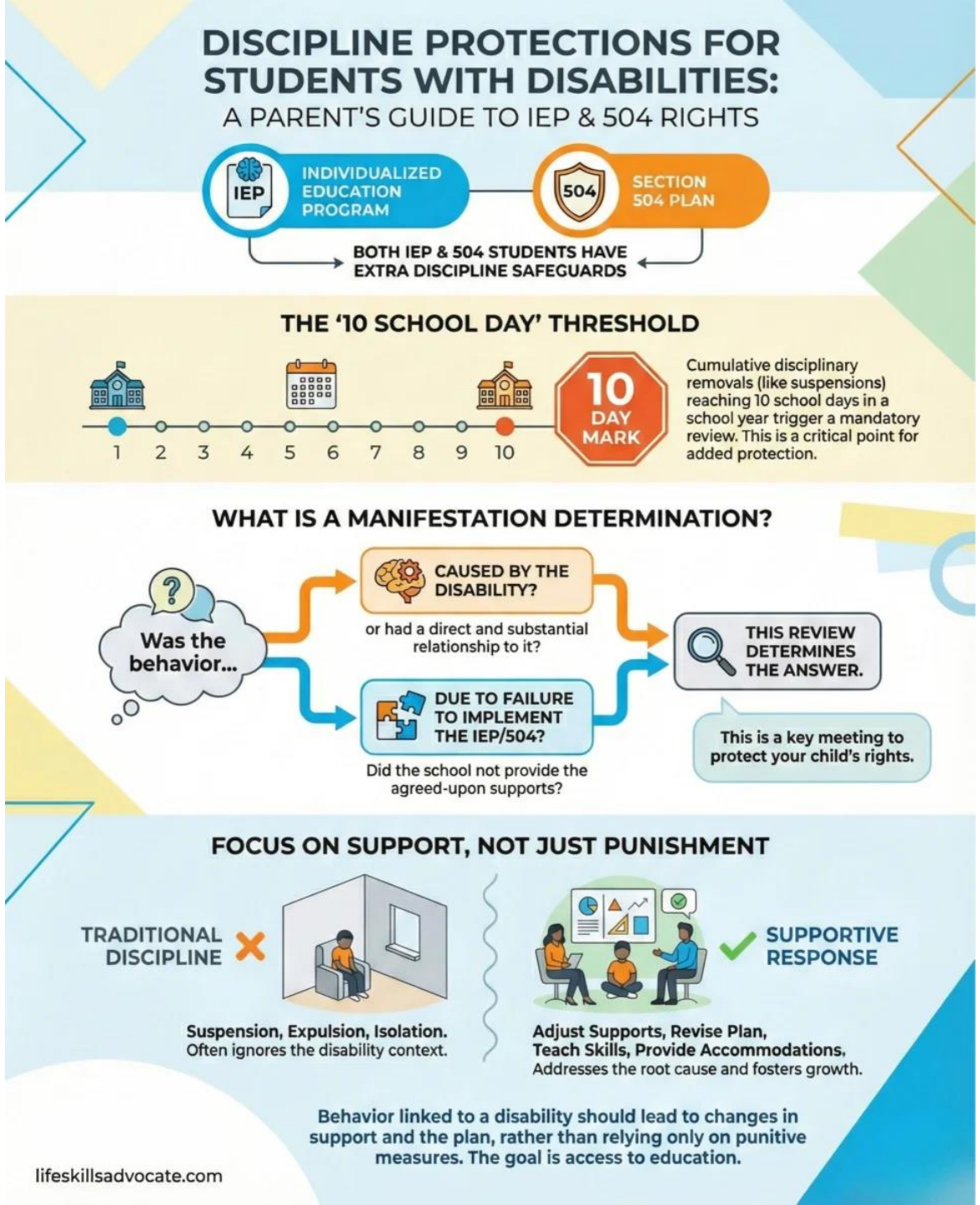


When Hitting Roadblocks



If responses **stall or progress slows**, take structured next steps.

- 1️⃣ **Follow Up in Writing:** Restate the concern, reference prior communication, and request a clear timeline.
- 2️⃣ **Request Documentation:** Ask for Prior Written Notice (PWN) or a written explanation if evaluation or services are refused.
- 3️⃣ **Elevate Within the System:** Contact the principal or district/central administration's EC Director if concerns remain unresolved.
- 4️⃣ **Seek Outside Support:** Consider an educational advocate, ECAC, Duke Educational & Legal Support Center, or Disability Rights NC if needed.



Discipline Disparities for Students with Disabilities

- Students with disabilities are about **2x more likely** to be suspended than nondisabled peers.
- Students with emotional disabilities face the highest removal rates.
- Discipline disparities are even greater for students of color with disabilities.

IDEA safeguards (10-day rule, MDR) and NC restraint/seclusion laws exist to protect educational access.

Gifted Identification (AIG) in North Carolina

Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) services are part of North Carolina's public education system and are often delivered as Tier 3 enrichment or advanced instruction within MTSS.

How Students Are Identified:

- All 2nd grade students are universally screened (typically using the CogAT)
- Additional aptitude and/or achievement testing
  may be conducted
- Teachers may recommend students
- Parents may request an evaluation at any time

Eligibility is based on multiple data points — not a single score.



AIG Identification - Equity Considerations

Historically, students from underrepresented backgrounds — including students of color, multilingual learners, and students from low-income households — have been under-identified for gifted services.

Families should know:

- Screening does not guarantee identification
- Parents can request an evaluation outside of universal screening
- Students can be both gifted and have a disability (twice-exceptional or “2e”)
- Access to advanced instruction is also an equity issue.

Just as we advocate for students who need additional support, we must also advocate for students who need additional challenge.

Resources, Advocacy, & Legal Support

LOCAL ADVOCACY GROUPS

Parent & Educator Groups

Can help with connecting with other families at your school and district. (free)

- **Durham Advocates for Exceptional Children**

EC Advocate Consultant

- Individuals who specialize in working with schools and families. Will provide review, recommendations, and is willing to attend IEP meetings. ($$$)

School PTA

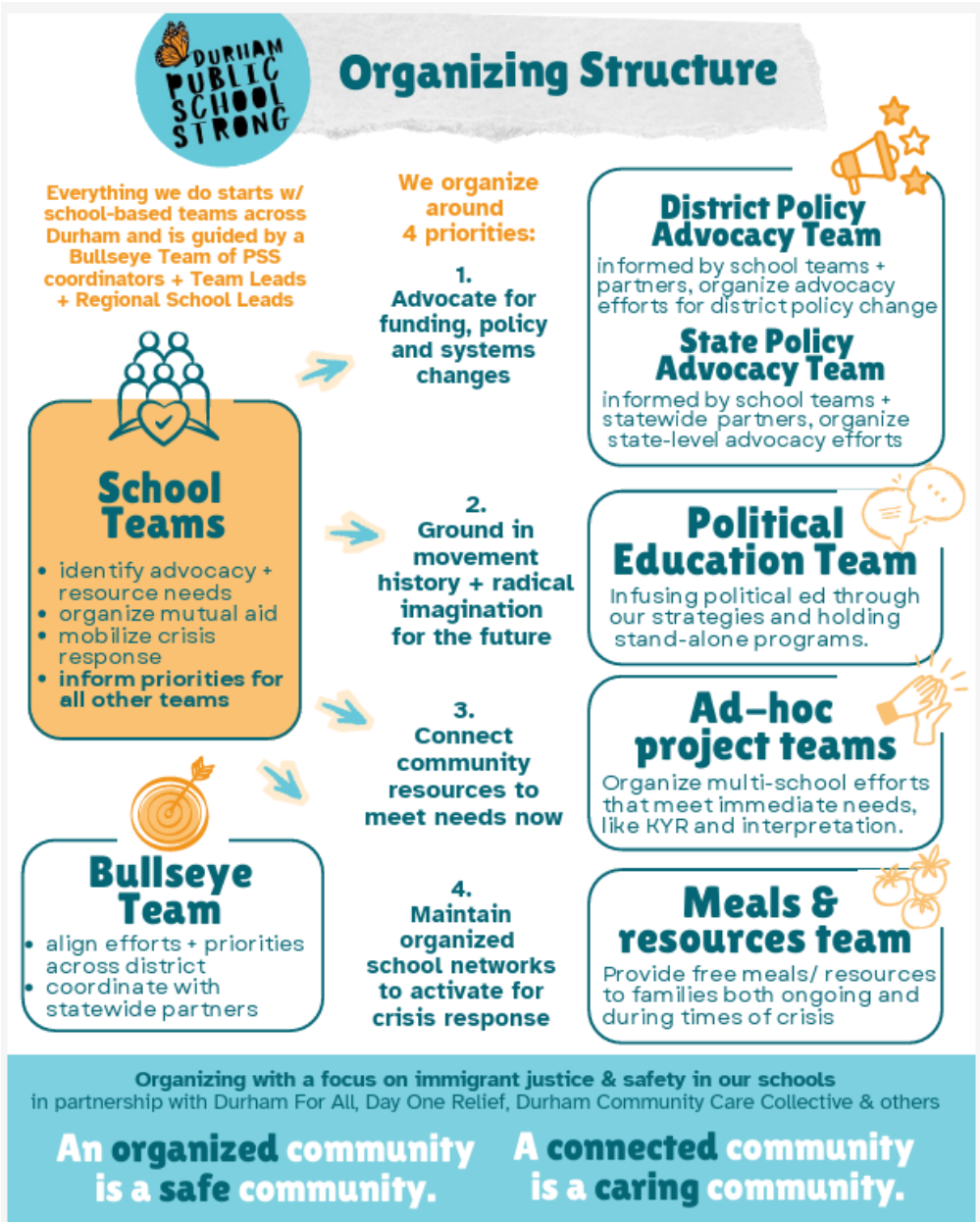
- PTAs can be a great resource for connecting with other EC families.

NC RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

Durham Public School Strong: Lessons from Community Organizing

Katie Barnhill, PhD

Durham Public School Strong Who are we & what do we do?



Lessons from Rapid Response Nov-Dec 2025

Our most effective school teams rose out of pre-existing & trusted relationships at those schools

Anecdotal Evidence of Impact Current Climate of Fear

Depending on the school, 30-50% average absentee rates during those weeks. These numbers dropped precipitously at schools where there were strong school care and protection teams.



Community Needs

- Food & other household resources
- Legal advice/counsel
- Language justice (language liaisons)
- Clear and effective policy



Future Collaboration Potential

Growing	mutual aid networks
Sharing	resources
Sharing	identified needs and work together to direct families to each other

Thank you!

Contact us at: publicschoolstrongdurham@gmail.com

A Look Ahead

For more events in the 5 NC InCK Counties, check out our NC InCK Webpage and Facebook. Also, explore our new NC InCK training page for archived ICRs, takeaways, and shared resources.

Upcoming NC InCK Events:

May Integrated Care Rounds: Thursday, May 7, 2026, 12-1 pm

Please contact Josie Hatley (anna.hatley@duke.edu) if you need the invitation for the ICR/Echo series.

Reminder: Request a certificate of attendance for today's ICR at this link

Upcoming Events and Resources:

Free Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) Training for Orange County Schools Parents and Guardians
OCS Welcome Center| Saturday, April 18, 2026 | 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Register here **by March 18, 2026** (space limited)

Free Pop-Up Clinic (Dental, Vision, and Medical Services)| Vance Charter School
2090 Ross Mill Road, Henderson, NC 27527 | March 28-20, 2026
No ID is required. Services are free and open to the public (first come, first serve)

Durham PreK Roll Up and Enroll
DPS Staff Development Center | Saturday, April 11, 2026 | 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
There will be food, resources, and family-friendly activities all while families can complete their Durham Pre-K application

Alamance County Events and Resources
March and April 2026









Alamance County Events and Resources
March and April 2026









Orange County Events and Resources
March and April 2026





Free Mobile Pharmacy
[Online Ordering and Event Information]



Youth Mental Health First Aid
[Registration Link]

Orange County Events and Resources
March and April 2026







Durham County Events and Resources
March and April 2026





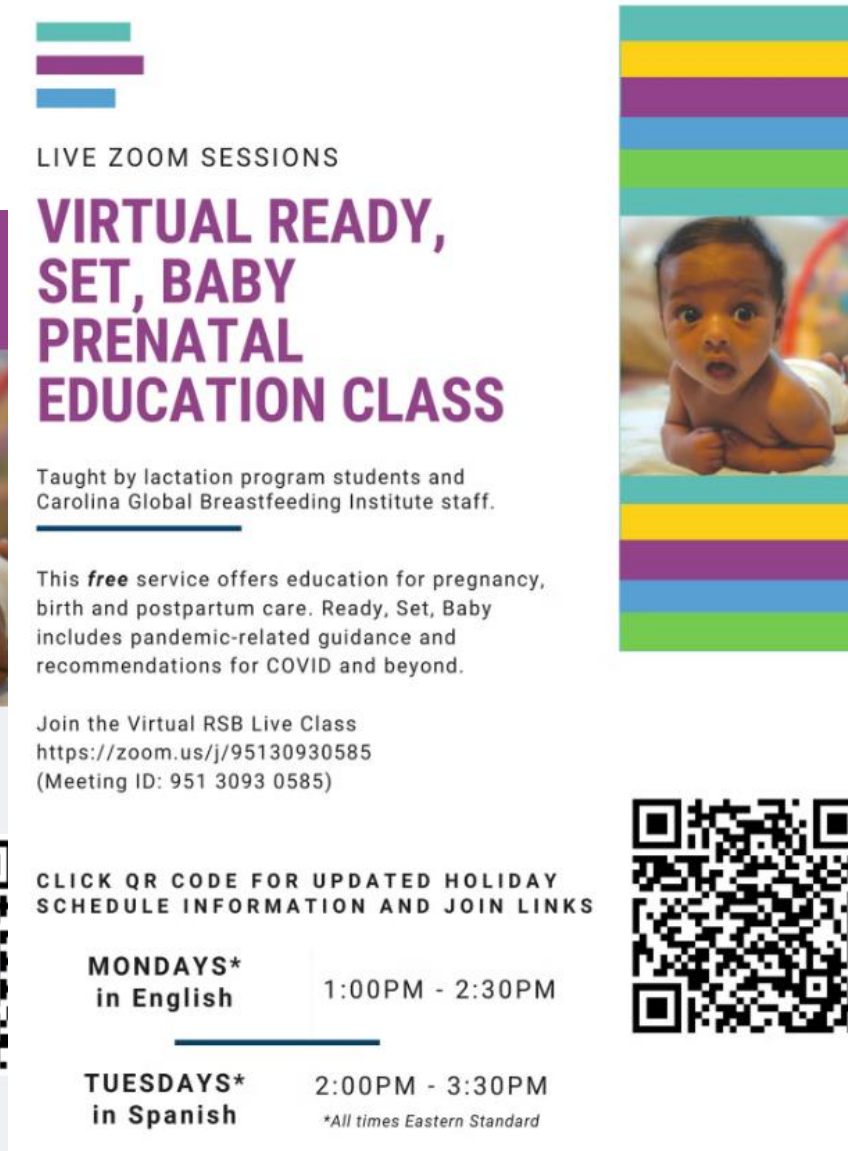
Durham County Events and Resources
March and April 2026



[Free Family Photoshoot Registration Link]



[Clases de Educación Prenatal]
(Spanish Class Information)



[Prenatal Breastfeeding Education]
(English Class Information)

Granville/Vance Events and Resources
March and April 2026









Granville/Vance County Events and Resources
March and April 2026

