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What Is a 504 Plan?

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A *504 Plan* is a special plan for a student who has a disability but does not qualify for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The number “504” refers to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This federal law protects students with disabilities. It states that a student with a disability cannot be excluded from any programs or activities that receive federal funding. Section 504 ensures that students who have disabilities have equal access to education as do their peers who do not have disabilities.

A 504 Plan identifies *accommodations* and *modifications* a student with a disability may need in order to participate in programs and activities. Accommodations and modifications on a 504 Plan may include (but are not limited to) special seating assignments (for example, near the door, near the bathroom, or near the teacher), additional time to complete tests or assignments, or using a recorder to record lessons.

How Does a Student Qualify for a 504 Plan?

According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2011), for eligibility under Section 504, “a student must be determined to:

- have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
- or have a record of such an impairment;
- or be regarded as having such an impairment.”



If a student meets these qualifications, the parents/caregivers and the educational team need to determine if the effect of the student’s impairment is so significant that accommodations and/or modifications are necessary for the student to be able to access programs and activities.



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How Is a 504 Plan Different From an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

If a student has a disability that requires him/her to receive *specialized instruction* (instruction that is *different* from that of his/her peers who do not have disabilities), the student is eligible for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In order to be eligible for an IEP, a student's disability must fall under one of the categories specified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there must be an evaluation which shows that the student's disability interferes with his/her ability to learn the educational material that is taught to all students, and there is evidence that the student requires special education services.

It is possible for a student to have a disability and not qualify for special education services and an IEP because he/she does not need *different instruction*. If a student is not eligible to receive an IEP, he/she may be eligible for a 504 Plan if he/she needs accommodations or modifications in order to have an *equal opportunity* to perform at the level of his/her peers. For more information about the eligibility criteria for IEPs or 504 Plans, contact your child's school.



Resources:

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2011). *Frequently asked questions about section 504 and the education of children with disabilities*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

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