

GROWING UP

The Number 504 and School Accommodations

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

A couple of years before, a boy had suffered a severe concussion in a car accident. Fortunately he appeared to recover fully and has been doing fairly well in his schoolwork. However, his parents are beginning to notice that their son is starting to struggle in completing his work and has become more inattentive. His parents are now starting to spend several hours each night working with their son on his homework. They have asked his teacher to modify it so as to lessen the time it is taking for the boy to complete his work. His teacher reports that the boy does get distracted but that his work is still where it should be so she should not have to make any modifications as it would be unfair to the other students.

The school suggests that the parents have an outside evaluation conducted to explore what may be causing the difficulties. The evaluation confirms the boy is still experiencing the after-effects of the concussion and it is showing up as inattention and difficulty with organization. The evaluator diagnoses him with ADHD. The parents assume that means their son can get the academic accommodations through special education services. However, the school refuses as the boy is still performing at grade level academically and his behaviors are not having a significantly negative impact in class.

The school then mentions for the parents to get a 504. Many times this single number is vaguely referenced to by school personnel but no further explanation occurs. The 504 is referring to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This law was passed to protect people with disabilities from discrimination while they are working or participating in federally funded programs, such as public schools. It focuses on students who have a disability that have “substantially limited major life activities”. If a student has been diagnosed with a disability, such as the situation described above, then the student is entitled to a plan that provides individually designed services and accommodations that address the impact of the disability on the school activity. A disability under the law covers a wide range of physiological and psychological impairments including ADHD, bipolar disorder, poor eye sight, cancer, and cerebral palsy.

In the above scenario, the school would invite the parents to a 504 meeting where the results of the evaluation would confirm the existence of a disability and that it is limiting the boy’s ability to learn. A school team and the parents would then create an Individualized Accommodation Plan (IAP) that contains the steps the school will take to ensure the boy’s needs are addressed. This plan is then reviewed periodically so it can be updated and address the boy’s current needs.

If your child has a disability that results in him or her struggling in school, consider asking the school for a 504 plan. Even if your child’s current teacher is providing accommodations, next year’s teacher may not. It is better to have a 504 plan in place and not need to use it rather than not having it. A 504 plan can provide peace of mind for parents that their child will get needed accommodations every year that he or she are in school.

Biography:

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