

Section 504 Background Information

What is Section 504?

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, commonly referred to as “Section 504,” is a federal statute that prohibits discrimination against persons on the basis of their disability by institutions, such as School Districts, that receive Federal financial assistance. It states:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Section 504’s purpose is, among other things, to assure that students with disabilities have educational opportunities and benefits equal to those provided to students without disabilities. Responsibilities of school districts under Section 504 include Child Find, Evaluation, Free Appropriate Public Education, Placement, and Procedural Safeguards. An eligible student under Section 504 is a student who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. If a student is covered by Section 504, School District must provide free appropriate public education (FAPE), including accommodations as are necessary to ensure that the student has equal access to services, programs and activities offered by our schools.

How does Section 504 differ from IDEA?

A student who qualifies for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is, in all cases, a qualified student with disabilities under Section 504. The converse, however, is not true: a qualified student with disabilities under Section 504 is not qualified in all cases to receive special education services and the protections of IDEA. In other words, some students with disabilities may qualify for protections under Section 504 but do not qualify for special education services under IDEA.

If a student with disabilities is receiving special education services in accordance with IDEA, the District’s obligations to provide FAPE have been met, but the student is still entitled to the non-discrimination protection under Section 504. However, if a student is determined ineligible under IDEA, the Section 504 team may consider whether the student qualifies for the protections of Section 504.

This manual will focus solely on Section 504. Any questions regarding IDEA should be directed to a school psychologist or the Special Education Department.