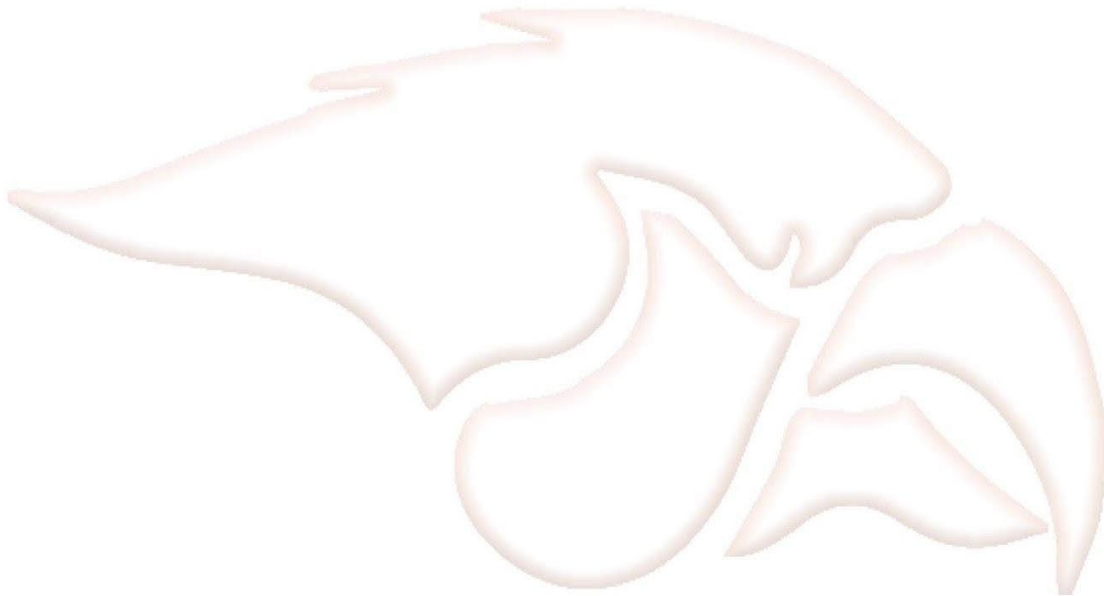




CEDAR SPRINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Guide to Navigating Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973



March 2026

WE CAN. WE WILL. WE ARE. TOGETHER.



SECTION 504

Section 504 is a part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Upon eligibility, a Section 504 Plan should “level the playing field” to ensure that equal opportunities exist for students with and without disabilities.

Why Would My Child Need an Evaluation?

An evaluation is completed to answer the following questions:

1. Does my child have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment?
2. Does my child need accommodations/modifications to participate in the general education curriculum and/or school environment, including extra curricular activities?

What is Child Find?

Child Find is a legal requirement that schools find all children who have disabilities and who may be entitled to specialized services. The school must identify, evaluate any child that it knows or suspects may have a disability, and (if eligible) must develop accommodations that afford equitable access to educational programming. The request for an evaluation generally occurs in one of the following ways:

- School districts, including all public and charter schools that receive federal financial assistance, are obligated to refer a student for an evaluation if the student is believed to have a disability and is in need of accommodations, or
- A referral can be made by a doctor, parent or school personnel. If a parent feels their child needs an evaluation, a request should be submitted (either verbally or in writing) to the building principal, teacher, 504 coordinator and/or other appropriate school personnel.

Additionally, the key to a referral from any source is whether the child has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity and that the student is in need of either:

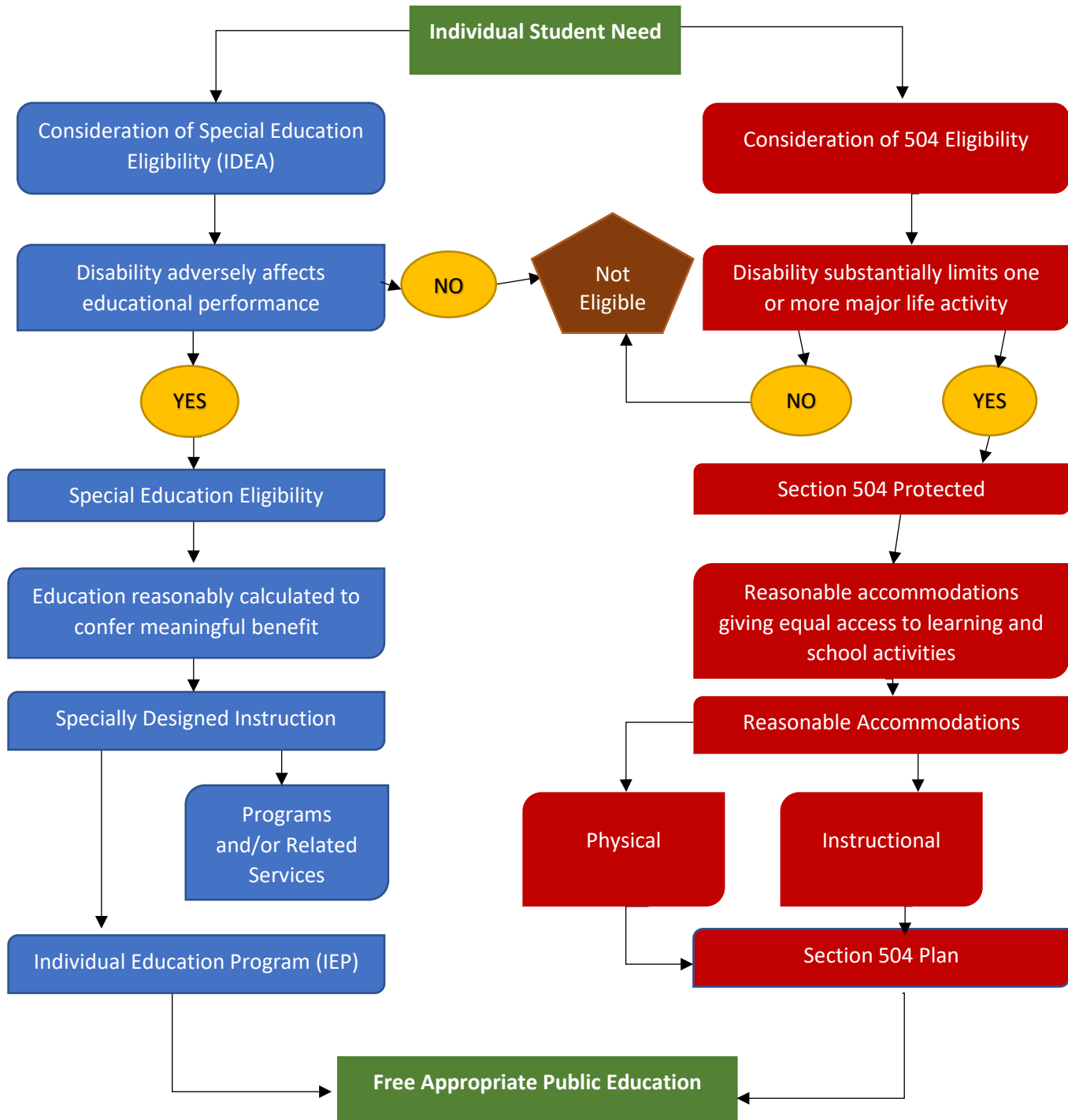
1. General education with supplementary accommodations, or
2. Special education and related services determined through a special education evaluation. In either case, if a parent requests a referral for evaluation and the school district refuses, the school district must provide the parent with notice of their procedural rights under Section 504.



IDEA/504 FLOW CHART

There are two laws that offer support and services for children identified with a disability: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This flowchart will help determine which plan may be appropriate for your child.

Source: Adapted from Council of Administrators of Special Education Inc. (CASE) – Student Access. A Resource Guide for Educators, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973





EVALUATION PROCESS

Under Section 504, formalized testing is not required; however, a variety of sources should be considered. A single source of information, such as a doctor's report or clinical evaluation cannot be the only information that is considered. It is the school's obligation to document and consider all information submitted for review when determining eligibility.

The 504 Committee should consider current and historical grade reports, teacher input/reports, information from parents or other agencies, state and district assessments, observations, discipline reports, attendance records, health records and adaptive behavior information if applicable.

Section 504 Eligibility

Under Section 504, an individual with a disability is defined as a person who:

1. has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity;
2. has a record of such an impairment; or
3. is regarded as having such an impairment.

The determination of whether a student has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity must be made on an individual student basis. In addition, when determining if someone meets the definition of a disability, the definition must be understood to provide a broader coverage for students suspected to have a disability.

Section 504 defines a physical or mental impairment as any:

- physiological disorder or condition
- cosmetic disfigurement, or
- anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological; musculoskeletal; special sense organs; respiratory, including speech organs; cardiovascular; reproductive; digestive; genito-urinary; hemic and lymphatic; skin; and endocrine or
- mental or psychological disorder such as organic brain syndrome, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities.

Under Section 504, an impairment may include any disability, long-term illness, or various disorders that "substantially" reduces or lessens a student's ability to access learning in the educational setting. Additionally, many students have conditions or disorders that are not readily apparent to others such as specific learning disabilities, diabetes, epilepsy, allergies, low vision, poor hearing, heart disease or chronic illness. If one or more of these identified conditions substantially limit the student's ability to receive an appropriate education as defined by Section 504, they may be considered to have an "impairment". Section 504 does not set forth a list of exhaustive specific diseases, conditions or disorders that constitute impairments because of the difficulty of ensuring the comprehensiveness of any such list. It is important to remember that the presence of a condition in it of itself does not qualify an individual for Section 504 protection. The impairment must also cause a substantial limitation of a major life activity.



Questions for 504 Eligibility

- Does the Student Have a Physical or Mental Impairment?
- Does the Impairment Substantially Limit a Major Life Activity or Major Bodily Function?
- Does the Student Require Accommodations to participate with Non-Disabled Peers?
- If the answer is Yes, then a Section 504 Plan should be developed

Major Life Activities

The list of major life activities under Section 504 includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Caring for oneself
- Bending
- Performing manual tasks
- Speaking
- Seeing
- Breathing
- Hearing
- Learning
- Eating
- Reading
- Sleeping
- Concentrating
- Walking
- Thinking
- Standing
- Communicating
- Lifting
- Working

Major bodily functions are also major life activities and include functions of the:

- Bowel, bladder, and brain
- Normal cell growth
- Immune, endocrine (thyroid, pituitary, and pancreas), respiratory, reproductive, circulatory, digestive, and neurological systems

Conditions that are episodic or in remission are acknowledged under Section 504 if they result in a substantial limitation in one or more major life activity while they are active.

Under Section 504, students who are currently using illegal drugs or alcohol are not covered or eligible under Section 504.

If you have questions or concerns regarding your child's academic or behavioral success, communicate with your child's teacher, counselor, or administrator to establish a meeting to determine problem-solving strategies.