

Section 504 Plans: An Introduction to the Basics

Every child learns differently. Some students need extra support at school because of a disability or health condition. This brief explains what a Section 504 Plan is, who may qualify, how it compares to an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and how parents can work with the school team to support their child's success.

Understanding Section 504

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act is a federal civil rights law that protects students with disabilities from discrimination and helps ensure they have equal access to education. A 504 Plan provides accommodations that remove barriers to learning without changing what a student is expected to learn.

Common Accommodations

A 504 Plan is based on your child's individual needs. Accommodations may include:

- Extra time on assignments or tests
- Preferential seating
- Breaks during long tasks
- A quiet testing location
- Help with organization
- Use of assistive technology
- Access to the school nurse
- Copies of classroom notes



When a 504 Plan Might Be Right for Your Child

Some students do not need special education but still need support because of a disability or health condition. A 504 Plan helps students fully participate in school by providing accommodations that meet their individual needs. Did you know that a student does not have to be failing classes to qualify for a Section 504 Plan?

Eligibility for a 504 Plan

A student may qualify if they have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The team considers how the disability affects the student's daily life and participation at school. A diagnosis alone does not automatically qualify a student.

Major life activities may include learning, reading, writing, thinking, communicating, seeing, hearing, walking, caring for yourself, and major body functions.

Did You Know?

- A student does not have to be failing classes to qualify.
- A medical diagnosis alone does not automatically qualify a student.
- Students with good grades may still qualify if a disability substantially limits a major life activity.

Developing a 504 Plan

If your child qualifies, the school team will develop a written 504 Plan that lists the accommodations needed for equal access to learning and school activities. The plan should be reviewed periodically and updated as your child's needs change.

Comparing a 504 Plan and an IEP

Both plans support students with disabilities, but they serve different purposes.

Feature	IEP	504 Plan
Purpose	Special education and related services	Accommodations for equal access
Who qualifies?	Meets IDEA eligibility and needs specially designed instruction	Disability substantially limits a major life activity
Need special education?	Yes	Not necessarily
Who is involved?	Required IEP team, including the parent	People who work with the student and understand the student's needs
Plan review	At least once each year	Periodically (best practice: yearly)
Parent protections	Detailed rights under IDEA	Rights and protections under Section 504

Not sure which plan is right for your child? Your school team can help determine whether your child needs accommodations through a Section 504 Plan or specially designed instruction through an IEP.

Parents as Partners

Parents know their child better than anyone. Share your child's strengths, needs, health history, and what you see at home. A 504 team may include a parent or guardian, general education teachers, a principal or administrator, a school counselor, a school nurse, the 504 coordinator, and others who know your child and understand their needs.

Questions to Consider

Before and during a meeting, ask yourself:

- What makes school difficult for my child?
- What accommodations help my child at home?
- What information was used to make the decision?
- How will teachers know about and provide the accommodations?

Parent Tip: Focus on how your child's disability affects everyday life—not just the diagnosis. Real-life examples help the team understand your child's needs and develop effective accommodations.

South Dakota Parent Connection is Here to Help!

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