



# The 504 Bulletin

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## What's new in Section 504?

As we begin the new school year you will notice a number of changes to the Section 504 program. The following is a quick overview of the numerous changes to the program, all of which are designed to make completion, submission and management of Section 504 at the building level easier and more user-friendly.

### Changes:

1. All Section 504 forms are now available for completion and submission online. Instructions for the new documents and process are included in the materials provided to administrators during the 2008-09 Leadership Academy;
2. The forms have significantly changed, providing a more manageable process;
3. Training for all Administrators and Section 504 building-level coordinators has begun and will be offered several times during the school year.

Additionally, once all 504 plans have been submitted to the ASD Office of Special Education, data concerning the program will become available. 504 Coordinators that have not submitted copies of their schools 504 plans have been notified and need to complete submission of their plans prior to the beginning of the school year. It is anticipated that data will identify the numbers of students, by building, by gender, by disability and provide information related to the types of accommodations provided to the students who have a current 504 plan. Program data should be available on or before October 31, 2008.

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### 504 Data

While each 504 coordinator has building-level knowledge of their 504 students, the district-wide data can best be stated as incomplete. Efforts at collecting, analyzing and coalescing the data into something useful have been limited in the past. The new online system will allow the ASD to collect more timely and accurate information about each school, the district as a whole and enable staff to obtain more meaningful training and guidance.

### Plan Review Requirements



Per a May 9, 2008 memo from Jerry Sjolander, all Section 504 plans must be reviewed not later than the end of the first grading period each school year. The end of the first grading period this year is **OCTOBER 17, 2008**. Plans must be reviewed by each student's 504 team, updated as needed, discontinued if needed and required notices provided to the student's parent or guardian. There are no exceptions to the requirement and a copy of each 504 plan should be submitted to the Office of Special Education upon completion of the required review. If assistance is needed please contact one of the other building coordinators or Burl Oliver, ASD District Coordinator (ext. 4272).

## Section 504 Building-Level Coordinators

A list of building-level Section 504 Coordinators is available online via the ASD District Connection. Listed are the names and schools of each coordinator and their contact telephone number. Do not be shy about using your fellow coordinators to obtain information and utilize their expertise! A number of the coordinators have been at this activity for a while and have become "resident experts" about the processes, paperwork, accommodations, communications, disabilities and compliance. While every potential 504 student needs to be individually assessed and individual plans developed, there are many commonalities, and the collective experience of numerous ASD staff can be a significant source of support and knowledge. Remember, if it is new to you, someone else has probably already dealt with a similar situation.



### §504 Questions and Answers

1. A student has been diagnosed with diabetes. Parents want a 504 plan in place in case the student experiences difficulties academically. Eligible?
2. A student in the 9th grade is getting passing grades in all of his classes. However, his parents say that until this year he was a straight "A" student and that he is now having difficulty in class, in homework and socially. They want a 504 plan in order to help him achieve better grades and better prepare him for a "good" college. Can 504 be an answer for this student?
3. Should accommodations have an impact on how assignments are graded?

### What were they thinking?

The following are actual statements on 504 plans submitted at the end of the last school year. Each of the comments was entered as a "stand alone" statement, with no additional supporting information. Can you tell what's wrong with each of the statements?

- Eligible for 504"
- "Student diagnosed with diabetes, parents want 504 plan in case it is needed.
- "Student decertified from special education, no disabilities, academics fine, honor student."
- "Student eligible for 504 plan. Flunked all classes except one; needs plan to help out with transition to high school in the fall."
- "Student has ADHD."
- "Student had a plan at previous school."
- "Emotional reaction to mathematics."
- "Thought about convening 504 team; decided not at this time."
- "Student eligible for special education, Mom wants 504 instead."

## Disability Information

As we did last school year, each month we will continue to provide information concerning “typical” 504 disabilities. All information provided will have a reference to the resources used to obtain the information and further information is always available from the ASD Office of Special Education or Health Services.

This month’s information concerns Learning Disabilities. IDEA defines “learning disability” as a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

The skills most often affected are: reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, and doing math. Learning disabilities (LD) vary from person to person. Researchers think that learning disabilities are caused by differences in how a person’s brain works and how it processes information. Children with learning disabilities are not “dumb” or “lazy”. In fact, they usually have average or above average intelligence.

There is no “cure” for learning disabilities. They are life-long. However, children with LD can be high achievers and can be taught ways to get around the learning disability. In addition, accommodations for students with LD are often effective in helping the student and teachers meet the challenges of the disability. Accommodations are alterations in the way tasks are presented that allow children with learning disabilities to complete the same assignments as their peers. It is important to note that accommodations do not alter the content of the assignments, give students an unfair advantage or in the case of assessments, change what a test measures. They do make it possible for the student with LD to show what they know without being impacted by their disability.

The following is a short list of the potential references for teachers to use in learning more about Learning Disabilities and how to work with students who have such disabilities:

1. [www.nichy.org/resources/LD1.asp](http://www.nichy.org/resources/LD1.asp)
2. LDOnline (Website only) [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)
3. Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) 4156 Library Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349. [www.laamerica.org](http://www.laamerica.org)
4. National Center for Learning Disabilities, 381 Park Avenue South, Suite 401, New York, NY 10016. [www.ld.org](http://www.ld.org)
5. Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD). The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), 1110 North Globe Road, Suite 300, Arlington, VA 22201-5704. [www.dldcec.org](http://www.dldcec.org)



### §504 Questions and Answers

1. Perhaps. But, the 504 team will need to determine if the student is qualified based on a review of pertinent records such as grades, testing, etc. A team should never place a student on a 504 plan “in case it’s needed.” Many students with medical conditions perform very well academically and do not need supports such as those provided via a 504 plan. A 504 plan should only be put into place when a student is in need of a uniform, consistent set of accommodations in order to be able to stay in a regular classroom setting and compete with non-disabled students academically.
2. Probably not. Section 504 is a program intended to provide students with disabilities impairing one or more major life activities with equal opportunities in comparison with his/her non-disabled peers. It is not a program designed to provide a student with optimal academic opportunities or a guarantee of academic/social success.
3. No. School assignments and tests completed with accommodations should be graded the same way as those completed without accommodations. After all, accommodations are meant to “level the playing field”, provide equal and ready access to the task at hand, and not meant to provide an undue advantage to the user.