

OPTIONS AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Special Education and Section 504 Students

Special Education Students

When a student is not as successful as expected, experiences significant difficulties in the classroom, and/or exhibits behaviors that concern parents or educators, the student is often referred for evaluation to determine if some disability is affecting a student's ability to learn. After a comprehensive evaluation, a committee is formed whose task it is to come to a consensus on whether or not the student has a disability, whether or not the disability is affecting the student's ability to learn, and whether the school/teachers can provide services to help the student progress academically. The committee is often composed of teaching professionals, a social worker or psychologist, a school nurse, a special education representative, the student and the student's parents/guardians. If the committee agrees that a disability has a significant and detrimental effect on a student's ability to learn, the committee will collaboratively write an Individual Academic Plan (IEP). The IEP consists of measurable goals and objectives and educational modifications that are designed to help a student be more successful in the classroom. Some typical IEP modifications for students with disabilities include, but are not limited to:

1. A shortened school day.
2. Shortened or modified assignments.
3. Placement in a special education classroom to provide remedial course work, appropriate level of instruction, or special instruction.
4. Alternate educational materials (braille, books on tape, etc.).
5. Grading policies that are modified to take into account a student's disability.
6. Tests administered orally rather than with pen/pencil.
7. A para-professional who serves as a classroom reader to assist with tests or in-class readings.
8. A sign language interpreter to assist with instruction.

504 Students

A student who has a mild disability and whose ability to learn is affected by that disability but does not qualify for special education services, may be a good candidate for a 504 Plan. The 504 Plan, like the

IEP is written by a committee whose make-up is much like an IEP committee but without a special education representative, nurse, or psychologist/social worker (unless necessary). Again, the committee tries to reach consensus as to the student's academic needs and the kinds of accommodations that the school/teachers can provide in a effort to help the student be more successful. The 504 Plan is much simpler than an IEP and emphasizes accommodations rather than modifications. Some common accommodations provided to 504 Students include, but are not limited to:

1. Preferential seating in the classroom
2. Extended time on in-class assignments or tests
3. Extended time on standardized tests
4. Tests administered in a quiet, non-distracting environment
5. Class notes supplemented by copies of notes from teacher/other students
6. The use of a word processor to assist with motor or visual motor deficits.
7. The use of a tape recorder to assist with note taking

The Options Program and IEP's and 504 Plans

The Options Program exists to supplement/support home school instruction and is limited in personnel, programs, curricular offerings, etc. The program works hard to meet students' educational needs but cannot possibly duplicate the comprehensive Special Education programs that can be found elsewhere. The Options Program can, however, provide accommodations within our schools and classrooms. For that reason, The Options Program will work closely with parents to develop an appropriate 504 Plan for those students for whom accommodations will help them to be more successful learners. Students, whose educational needs are more acute/severe and are in need of the kinds of modifications an IEP would provide, will not find The Options Program able to provide those specific and intensive educational modifications. For that reason, The Options Program will not write IEP's. In rare instances, students who have an IEP will remain with the Options Program but no modifications will be given to the student. Sometimes, Special Education students can benefit from a 504 Plan, and the Options counselor should be contacted to discuss this possibility. The Options counselor, David Manchak, can be reached at 303-915-6785.

