



SECTION 504: A CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTION A BRIEF OVERVIEW

What is Section 504?

Section 504 is a federal civil rights statute passed in 1973 that protects people, ages 3-22, from discrimination based on a disability. Section 504 differs from an Individualized Education Program (IEP), in that it does not provide specialized instruction. If eligible for protections, a 504 plan containing accommodations, modifications, and related services may be developed.

In order to meet eligibility, one must have a disability or significant impairment. A disability, as defined by law,

- ▶ “is a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities” Major life activities may include learning, walking, breathing, eating, concentrating, and many others..
- ▶ “is a record of such impairment”
- ▶ “is regarded as having such an impairment”

Many people have impairments that do not rise to the level of limiting a major life activity. A team of people knowledgeable about the child and a comprehensive evaluation will help make that determination. There is no “one” evaluation for every situation, the team will seek information in relevant areas as needed.



The first step is a 504 referral. Begin with questions to your 504 Building Administrator listed on the CPS website under [Section 504 Contacts](#) or contact the Cambridge District Teacher in Charge of 504, Christine DeAmbrose cdeambrose@cpsd.us. Temporary and/or episodic impairments MAY also be protected such as concussions, chronic illness, or broken bones.

After referral, consent is required to initiate a 504 evaluation. Parents/caregivers are not required to participate, but they are always invited and encouraged in the Cambridge Public Schools.

For Section 504 Plan eligibility, the impact must be so substantial that accommodations, services or modifications are required to level the playing field and access a free, appropriate education. A person may have a doctor’s diagnosis or report, but may not meet eligibility for a 504 plan.

If a student is eligible for a plan, the process should take no more than 45 school days to complete from referral to eligibility meeting. An annual meeting and 504 reevaluation every three years are required.

Watch for additional 504 articles in next month’s newsletter!