



Dos and don'ts for implementing accommodations on Section 504 plans during remote learning

Don't overlook students' Section 504 plans this school year, said Linda L. Yoder, a school attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford, Conn. "Everyone is focused on IEPs [and] it's 'out of sight, out of mind,'" she said, when it comes to 504 plans. "We need to look at [them]."

Here are a few **dos** and don'ts as you review students' plans this year, specifically regarding accommodations and how to implement them during remote learning:

✓ **Do determine what the student needs.** Then, get beyond, "We don't do that," to figure out, "How do we do it?" Yoder said.

Sometimes the answer is, "We can't," she said. For example, sending a paraprofessional into each student's home is not possible. "We can't make sure the paraprofessional is not exposed to COVID-19 or is not exposing the student and family to COVID-19," Yoder said. "But there's still a lot we can do online if we think about ... techniques," she said. For example, instead of sitting next to the student at the computer, the paraprofessional can watch the student in Google Meet and communicate with the student using the chat feature.

x Don't be hasty to delete accommodations. If an accommodation can't be implemented in a remote learning environment, don't simply cross out, Yoder said. Instead, write next to it, "This accommodation put on hold until return to in-person learning," she said. Keep it on the plan, but make it clear, "This accommodation will be implemented in this environment," or "This accommodation will be implemented in this other environment," she said.

✓ **Do figure out how to address common issues.** Look through several Section 504 plans and write down the common issues, Yoder said. Some examples might include: How do I keep the student on task? Get the student to take good notes? To follow along? Then approach your IT support and say, "Can you work with me on ways to address these common questions?" Yoder said.

"You wouldn't have the IT person at every 504 meeting -- we don't have the staff to do that," Yoder said. "But if we can come up with common themes we are seeing over and over again, and present these questions, I think that would be a very good resource."

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x Don't prioritize formal paperwork over access. Worry first about getting a student access to her education and don't delay access if you can't readily schedule a 504 meeting, Yoder said.

"Yes, you should have medical documentation in writing," she said. "Technically you need a 504 plan for a disability accommodation. But making sure an accommodation is in place so that a student can have access to a program is the most important thing. If you're doing that and you're slow on the meeting/formal paperwork because we're in the middle of a pandemic, I don't think that's the highest priority."

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