

### ***What is the role of parents?***

Parents are their child's first and most important teacher, as well as his/her advocate. If parents believe their child has a disability or is having problems in school, they should contact their child's teacher to discuss these concerns. Parents play a key role by providing important information to schools about their child's needs. Parents are also an important part of the Section 504 team process, and are encouraged to attend meetings and assist in developing appropriate and meaningful interventions for their child.

***What rights do parents have under Section 504?*** As a parent, you have the right: (1) to receive a copy of this notice when the district takes any action regarding the identification, evaluation, and placement of a student pursuant to Section 504; To receive notice from the district with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational program or placement of your child; (2) to examine all relevant records relating to decisions regarding your child's identification, evaluation, and educational placement; (3) The district endeavors to work collaboratively and to resolve matters at the school level if possible or district level if no resolution occurs at the school level. Please see the Public Schools of Brookline Internal 504 Grievance Process and Procedure. (4) Parents may at any time contact the Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Program Quality Assurance (PQA) Unit, and dispute resolution programs and/or the Office of Civil Rights.

### **Christina Palmer**

Director of Guidance and Clinical Services  
333 Washington Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Brookline, MA 02445  
(617) 730-2460

## **Section 504 Contact Information:**

### **Brookline Elementary Schools**

Please contact your guidance counselor  
or principal

### **Brookline High School**

Please contact your high school  
Guidance Counselor

or

Guidance Department Coordinator  
Darby Neff-Verre  
617-731-5017

### **District Section 504 Coordinator**

#### **Christina Palmer**

Director of Guidance and Clinical Services  
333 Washington Street, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Brookline, MA 02445  
(617) 730-2460

### **Office for Civil Rights**

#### **U.S. Department of Education**

5 Post Office Square, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Boston, MA 02110-1491  
Telephone: 617-289-0111  
FAX: 617-289-0150  
TDD: 877-521-2172  
Email: [OCR.Boston@ed.gov](mailto:OCR.Boston@ed.gov)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF  
BROOKLINE

## **A PARENT'S GUIDE TO SECTION 504**



## **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

“No otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

### ***What Is Section 504?***

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is Congress's directive to schools receiving federal funding from the United States Department of Education to prohibit discrimination based on disability from all aspects of school operation. The law states, "No otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

Section 504 is a civil rights statute which protects the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities. Section 504 focuses on assuring access to all of the districts programs and activities, including the educational services and the learning process that is equal to that given students who do not have disabilities. Therefore, it is the primary responsibility of regular education staff and administration to implement those practices and procedures necessary for a school to fulfill the law's requirements.

### ***What does Section 504 require?***

Section 504 requires that schools do not discriminate against individuals based on disability; provide individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in their programs or activities, and provide eligible students with a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) regardless of the nature or severity of their disability. Under Section 504, a FAPE consists of the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services designed to meet the student's individual educational needs as adequately as the needs of nondisabled students are met. Section 504 requires notice of parent and student rights and due process for matters related to the identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disability, and the adoption and implementation of grievance procedures which provide for a prompt and equitable response to claims of discrimination or harassments based on disability.

### ***Who is Eligible under Section 504?***

In order to be eligible for services under Section 504, the Team must determine that the student is a qualified individual with a disability. A qualified student with a disability is an individual with:

1. a mental or physical impairment that
2. substantially limits
3. a major life activity

A student must meet all three criteria in order to qualify for a Section 504 Accommodation Plan.

### ***What is a Section 504 referral?***

A referral for a Section 504 determination can be made by a parent, guardian, teacher, student support team, counselor, other school staff and administration, and/or community agencies. The referring person completes a Section 504 referral sheet detailing the specific reason(s) for the referral. Referrals for Section 504 are usually initiated through the Early Intervention Team (EIT) process or parent/guardian referral.

### ***What happens after a referral is made?***

Once the school 504 Coordinator receives a Section 504 referral, he/she must notify parents that a referral has been made, and provide them with a copy of the Section 504 Student/Parent Rights. Parents should sign one copy acknowledging that they have received the rights and return this copy to the 504 Coordinator.

The Section 504 Coordinator determines what documentation exists that indicates a possible disability. This documentation may include assessments from a special education evaluation, information from the Early Intervention Team process, or outside assessments that have been completed through the parent. Parent/guardian permission (i.e., a signed release of information) is required to proceed with the initial eligibility determination and to obtain outside information from private providers.

Once documentation has been obtained, the 504 Coordinator schedules a Section 504 Team meeting to review the documentation and make a determination of eligibility for a Section 504 Accommodation Plan. If no documentation exists and the parent has provided consent for evaluation, the Section 504 Team should convene to consider whether or not an evaluation is warranted and what, if any, assessments should be conducted.

### ***What is a Section 504 "team?"***

The Team must include persons knowledgeable about:

1. the student
2. the meaning of the evaluation data
3. the placement options.

The question of who needs to be on the Section 504 Team is made on a case-by-case basis. Although Section 504 does not explicitly require that parents or guardians are part of the Team, the District is required to make all reasonable efforts in order to ensure their participation because they are knowledgeable about the student. There is no specific requirement as to the number of individuals that need to be on the Section 504 Team or any individual that must be present. The District strongly recommends that the parents or guardians and the building level Section 504 Coordinator be present for all Section 504 meetings.

### ***What are Section 504 accommodations?***

Accommodations are adjustments and/or modifications made by the classroom teacher(s) and other school staff that enable students to have equal access and benefit from the educational program. The accommodations must go beyond what a teacher or school would normally provide as a part of best teaching practices. Types of accommodations may include:

1. Presentation Accommodations: Changes in the way information is presented to accommodate learning styles
2. Response Accommodations: Allows student to complete work in different ways or to use an assistive device or organizer
3. Setting Accommodations: Changes in the setting or location in which an assignment or test is given.