



How to implement common accommodations in a remote learning environment

When reviewing Section 504 plans, think about them not in terms of, "These are the accommodations we always give," but in terms of the need to be creative with accommodations for a student who is not physically at school, said Linda L. Yoder, a school attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford, Conn.

Convene the 504 team to determine what accommodations still make sense and in what environment, she said. "I've seen some people say, 'Cross out everything that doesn't work with remote learning,'" she said. "I wouldn't do that."

Instead, think about how you might solve a problem, she said. Make sure what you come up with is not ambiguous. "Really communicate in the plan something that relates to the particular environment."

Here are a few examples of common accommodations on Section 504 plans and ways they might be implemented in a remote learning environment.

- **Extended time.** You may give the student a 90-minute window for a 60-minute online exam, Yoder said. Or maybe have the student do the exam in two different time blocks, but do not show him the entire exam if you do so. Provide half of the questions one week, and the other half following week so that the student cannot use the week in between to look up answers to the second half of the questions.

- **Chunking assignments.** When coronavirus first hit, many districts sent packets of work to students at home. For a student with a 504 plan, getting a whole stack with weeks of work to go through might lead to a total shut down, Yoder said. They might have trouble breaking down and organizing long-term assignments.

You might tell the parents to give the student only the first three pages the first week, then the next three pages the following week, and so forth. Or you might send the packets to the student's house a little at a time instead of sending all the materials at once.

- **Preferential seating.** Consider as an example a student who has preferential seating as an accommodation on her Section 504 plan because of distractibility issues, Yoder said. In school, she may not have needed more than to be seated in the front row. However, at home, going to class via Google Meet, she may need a noise-cancelling headset to keep out distracting background noise of other family members, the dog, or someone watching television in the next room, Yoder said.

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"Not everyone has the luxury of a big house with separate study space, [that's] quiet and appropriate," she said. "A lot of [students] are at the kitchen table and things are going on around them."

- **Paraprofessional assistance.** For a student who has paraprofessional support as an accommodation on his Section 504 plan, first determine if he needs that paraprofessional support at home, Yoder said. Then figure out if you can provide it. If so, what does it look like? "Rather than just saying 'Paraprofessional support,' it would be good to spell out what that looks like," Yoder said.

For instance, a paraprofessional might watch class sessions on Google Meet and communicate individually with students to bring them back on task if they are wandering, she said. The paraprofessional can communicate with the student via the chat feature. The paraprofessional can listen in on classes and take notes, or can share a screen with a student as he takes notes of a lecture. If the student misses something, the paraprofessional can say, "Maybe you should type this in your notes because it's important."

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