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**WELCOME BACK
TO SCHOOL!**

504 Plans vs. IEPs

A 504 plan is different from an individualized education program (IEP). The main difference is that a 504 plan modifies a student's regular education program in a regular classroom setting. A 504 plan is monitored by classroom teachers. A student with an IEP, as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), may receive different educational services in a special or regular educational setting, depending on the student's need. IEP programs are delivered and monitored by additional school support staff.

Also, parental approval and involvement is required for an IEP, but not for a 504 plan. Full parental participation in the 504 plan process, however, is important for the student's academic success.

It's important to note that students with IEPs are also entitled to the additional protections and services offered by 504 plans. Students with IEPs might benefit from a 504 plan, for example, if they're moving from a special education setting to a regular classroom.

504 Plan Basics

Students can qualify for 504 plans if they have physical or mental impairments that affect or limit any of their abilities to:

- walk, breathe, eat, or sleep
- communicate, see, hear, or speak
- read, concentrate, think, or learn
- stand, bend, lift, or work

Examples of accommodations in 504 plans include:

- preferential seating
- extended time on tests and assignments
- reduced homework or classwork
- verbal, visual, or technology aids
- modified textbooks or audio-video materials
- behavior management support
- adjusted class schedules or grading
- verbal testing
- excused lateness, absence, or missed classwork
- pre-approved nurse's office visits and accompaniment to visits

The goal of 504 plans is for students to be educated in regular classrooms along with the services, accommodations, or educational aids they might need. If students with these plans can't achieve satisfactory academic success, as is determined by the school, then alternative settings in the school or private or residential programs can be considered.

A 504 plan should be considered when a student isn't benefiting from instruction due to a physical or mental impairment. The issue can be raised by a parent or legal guardian, teacher, physician, or therapist.

Just a reminder to work in partnership with the biological parents in regards to their child's 504 plan.

Mental health issues common among Iowa high school students

Facing intense academic demands and ever-present peer comparisons through social media, an increasing number of Iowa high school students grapple with mental health issues and enduring problems previous generations seldom confronted, an IowaWatch High School Journalism Project has found.

Michelle Kim, who just completed her senior year at Iowa City West High School, describes going through depressive periods as “drowning” and says healing sometimes is more complicated than just coming up for air.

“And then it gets to that point where I don’t care anymore,” she said. “I don’t care about my social life; I don’t care about my grades. It’s just a cycle of sadness.”

School counselors and student advocates say they are seeing an increased number of students coping with mental health problems, and a state survey shows that the number of 11th-graders, especially girls, contemplating suicide and experiencing depression and anxiety are creeping up.

“I see more and more mental health issues and social/emotional problems and deficiencies,” said Derek Ziesmer, the guidance counselor at Forest City High School in northern Iowa. Ziesmer said students also face more technological distractions, including social media, that previous generations didn’t confront.

At West High in Iowa City, Jamie Schneider, the student and family advocate for six years with a background in social work, sees 200 to 300 students a year. On busy days, she sees “two or three students per class period.”

Often, teens taking part in surveys report stress levels higher than what adults report. And other experts point to increased access to drugs and academic pressures. The results of these pressures show up in the numbers.

In Iowa, 17 percent of 11th-graders reported having seriously thought about killing themselves in the previous 12 months, an increase of nearly 2 percentage points since 2012, according to the Public Health Department’s Iowa Youth Survey of students in grades 6, 8 and 11. [Click here to read more.](#)



#4—Support Homework Expectations

Homework in grade school reinforces and extends classroom learning and helps kids practice important study skills. It also helps them develop a sense of responsibility and a work ethic that will benefit them beyond the classroom.

In addition to making sure your child knows that you see homework as a priority, you can help by creating an effective study environment. Any well-lit, comfortable, and quiet workspace with the necessary supplies will do. Avoiding distractions (like a TV in the background) and setting up a start and end time can also help.

A good rule of thumb for an effective homework and/or study period is roughly 10 minutes per elementary grade level. Fourth-graders, for example, should expect to have about 40 minutes of homework or studying each school night. If you find that it’s often taking significantly longer than this guideline, talk with your child’s teacher.

While your child does homework, be available to interpret assignment instructions, offer guidance, answer questions, and review the completed work. But resist the urge to provide the correct answers or complete the assignments yourself. Learning from mistakes is part of the process and you don’t want to take this away from your child. [Click here](#) to read more ways to help your child succeed,

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