



Key points:

- **Put community on notice**
- **Make sure all campus employees know 504 eligibility criteria, process**
- **Recognize that students with IHPs may be eligible for 504 plans**

Take time this summer to shore up your child find activities under Section 504

Section 504 requires districts to annually "undertake to identify and locate every qualified [individual with a disability] residing in [the district's] jurisdiction who is not receiving a public education." [34 CFR 104.32](#) (a). Additionally, districts must evaluate students who because of their disability need or are believed to need special education or related services. [34 CFR 104.35](#) (a).

Now's a good time to review your child find procedures and ensure all staff are up to speed on your district's requirements under the law.

Make it public

Typically, school districts meet their child find requirement by reaching out to local community organizations like Head Start or preschools or to any organization where children are participating in some sort of preschool-type activity, said Catherine L. Lyons, a school attorney at [Lyons & Rogers, LLC](#) in Rockland, Mass. They may also provide public notices in the local newspaper and on cable access channels.

"Once a year, we put a notice in newspapers that says we don't discriminate and who to contact for ADA/Section 504 and for special ed as well," said Lisa Hardcastle, Section 504 coordinator for the [Clear Creek \(Texas\) Independent School District](#). "You just sort of put the community on notice: 'If you suspect a school-age child has a disability or may be eligible for 504, please contact the school department and we'll talk about conducting an evaluation.'"

Some districts are also getting creative and putting notices on their websites and social media pages, like Twitter and Facebook, Lyons said.

Hardcastle said technology has made the information more accessible for parents. "If I talk to a parent on the phone who has contacted me with questions, I can direct them to

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our website," she said. "We have a page with information any parent can access about our Section 504 responsibilities."

Help parents with the process

"I think sometimes we make it very difficult for parents because we're used to the jargon we use," Hardcastle said. But parents may not know what exactly they are asking for or how to express it. In her district, Hardcastle encourages all campus 504 coordinators to provide parents who request 504 services with an informative brochure, she said.

"Sometimes parents may have just heard [about Section 504] but are not sure what it is or how to request services," she said. "Or when a parent calls, they don't know to say, 'I suspect my child has a disability,' so we have to prod them to find out why they're giving us that information."

Educate all employees about 504

Once children are in school, there's still a child find obligation, Lyons said. Teachers or parents may refer a child for an evaluation.

"Make sure counselors, nurses, and classroom teachers know that information," Hardcastle said. "They're frequently the first person the parent will come to."

But everybody on campus must know the basic eligibility criteria and the process for referral under Section 504, Hardcastle said. A teacher may call a parent to tell him that his child is acting out in class, for example. If the parent replies, "Well, he has ADHD," that teacher needs to know to find the person is responsible for Section 504 on their campus and notify her, Hardcastle said.

"The most important thing is keeping everybody's eyes and ears open for those red flags," said Hardcastle. "Any employee of the district should know what to do with that information."

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Consider IHP a potential trigger to evaluate

Lately, Lyons has been working a lot with school nurses, as students who enroll in school and have individualized healthcare plans created for them by the nurse may also be eligible for a Section 504 plan, she said.

It's quite common for parents to communicate with the school nurse about their child's medical condition, Lyons said. Based on the information provided to her, the nurse will offer to develop an individual health plan for the student.

An IHP cannot supplant a 504 plan, and a student won't automatically qualify for a 504 plan because he has an IHP, Lyons said. But if a student has an IHP, that should be an indicator that the student may require a referral for an evaluation to determine if he is eligible under Section 504, Lyons said.

[Florence Simmons](#) covers Section 504, paraeducators, and transportation for LRP Publications.

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