

Get Schooled On Concussions

“When to Write a Section 504 Plan: Part 1” Issue #3: Jan. 2015

As the physical and educational implications of concussions continue to affect schools and school districts, one of the main questions we hear daily is... when does a school write a Section 504 Plan for a student with a concussion?

This is such a big and complicated question that we will dedicate a few Topic Pages just to this one topic. Read - “When to Write a Section 504 Plan: Part 1 and Part 2”.

Be sure to follow up with “How to Write a Section 504 Plan.”

Before we delve into “when” to write a Section 504 Plan for a student with a concussion, we would be remiss if we did not remind you... a “typical” concussion will impact academics for 1 to 4 weeks, on the average 2 to 3 weeks. Eighty to 90% of concussions will be resolved in 3 to 4 weeks. So first you must ask yourself, if the majority of concussed students will only need academic supports for up to 3 to 4 weeks; more supports in weeks 1 and 2, and less and less supports into weeks 3 and 4, do you NEED to write a Section 504 Plan?

If 80 to 90% of concussions will resolve within 1 to 4 weeks, then make sure your school has a good plan for early identification and early intervention of concussion. Does this sound familiar? It follows the same *philosophical* principles of “Response to Intervention (RTI)” or “Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)”. We are not using these terms in relation to eligibility for staffing into special education. We are simply using these terms in a philosophical manner. In the normal population, 80 to 90% of students will respond well to early identification, early intervention in a regular education classroom – that goes for learning, that goes for behavior and that goes for concussion. So before proceeding too far with formal Section 504 Plans in your school, ask yourself, am I maximizing my efforts toward “universal” concussion management:

- Training to general education teachers?
- Support to general education teachers?
- Seamless system of communication between academics and athletics in your school?
- Seamless system of communication between the school, the doctors and the parents?
- Multiple and generous academic “adjustments” in the general education classroom?

The first several weeks is your place of highest yield. If you maximize your efforts during this time period, 80 to 90% of your students with concussion will resolve in 3 to 4 weeks and will not need a Section 504 Plan. Do you have 80 to 90% concussion resolution in your school? Do you have only 10 to 20% of concussed students needing a Section 504 Plan? This should be your check and balance system. If you discover that you are writing Section 504 Plans for more than 20% of students, go back and shore up your “universal” general education interventions first (Tier 1).

The best way to help your “universal” level students is to empower the general education teachers to provide immediate and generous academic “adjustments”. The word “adjustments” is used intentionally here to refer to interventions given in the general education classroom, applied freely in weeks 1 and 2 with no delay or paperwork, weaned back over weeks 3 and 4 and removed when no longer needed.

The term Academic Adjustments is used intentionally to denote general education interventions applied flexibly and generously (in most cases, there will be no need for a formal Section 504 Plan) within the first 1 to 4 weeks of a concussion.

For more information on classroom interventions that align with academic adjustments, view **GetSchooled: Symptom Wheel, Issue #6**

For more information on the philosophical application of RTI/MTSS to concussion, view **GetSchooled: Response to Management, Issue #7**

Do you have a concussed student who has not gotten better with “universal” interventions and now legitimately needs a Section 504 Plan?
Go on to GetSchooled: When to Write a Section 504: Plan Part 2, Issue #4

The term Academic Accommodations is used intentionally to denote general education interventions applied strategically under a Section 504 Plan for concussed students who have a protracted recovery (4+ weeks).

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