

The Section 504 Process in Middle School: Perspectives of Parents, Teachers and Section 504 Coordinators

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Abstract

This phenomenological study investigated the perceptions of three teachers, four parents, and three Section 504 coordinators regarding the development and implementation of the Section 504 process for children in middle schools who have attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, or central auditory processing disorder. Analysis of the data gathered revealed that parents and teachers lacked a clear understanding the Section 504 process and often felt frustrated during the development, implementation, or review of a student's Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP). Furthermore, lack of time within a teacher's schedule was a major barrier to collaboration and communication with parents. Based on the findings of this study, the authors make specific recommendations to educators and parents for improving the Section 504 process so that students will receive the greatest benefit.

Introduction

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal anti-discrimination statute protecting the civil and constitutional rights of persons with disabilities (29 u.s.c. 794 (a), 1998). Under Section 504, one might expect accommodations to be made in the school setting for such diseases, conditions, and disabilities as attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, anxiety, asthma, behavioral difficulties, central auditory processing disorder, cerebral palsy, communicative diseases, conduct disorder, depression, drug/alcohol addiction, eating disorders, medical conditions (e.g., allergies, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, hemophilia), obesity, posttraumatic stress syndrome, and temporary illness (Miller & Newbill, 2006).

Interpretation and understanding of the mandates set forth by Section 504 for eligible students continue to evolve in the field of education. For more than 20 years, Section 504 was virtually ignored by many public schools because many administrators assumed that meeting the needs of students with disabilities under P. L. 94-142 was all that was required (Council of Administrators of Special Education, 1992). School district administrators perceived their main obligation under Section 504 as ensuring physical

access to public buildings (i.e., ramps were installed, curbs were cut, elevators were added to multi-story buildings, etc). As parents and advocates for children with disabilities learned more about Section 504, schools were required to respond to requests for protections and services under this law (Smith, 2002).

In 1991, a joint policy memorandum from the Department of Education and Office of Civil Rights (OCR) brought Section 504 legislation into the forefront and initiated widespread discussions about its implementation in public schools (Davila, Williams, & MacDonald, 1991). The Department of Education and Office of Civil Rights have become active in assisting school district personnel to broaden their understanding of “equal access” to include classroom accommodations and modifications through individual accommodation plans for students with special needs.

The individual accommodation plan is a document developed by a team of individuals who know the student. It describes the student’s disability and outlines the accommodations and modifications that will be made by the general education teachers and other school staff. Individual accommodation plans are developed and implemented so that students can be successful in their educational programs (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 1995; deBettencourt, 2002). Section 504 individual accommodation plans are intended to “level the playing field” so that students with disabilities have equal opportunities (Miller & Newbill, 2006; Smith, 2002).

Smith (2002) stated that Section 504 is not the responsibility of special education; rather, it is the responsibility of general education and all institutions receiving federal financial assistance must comply with Section 504. Therefore, it is especially critical for general education teachers to understand the educational implications of Section 504 as it relates to students in their classrooms. In the early 1990’s, a high school social studies teacher was sued by a student’s parents for refusing to provide oral testing, an accommodation listed on the student’s individualized education program. The teacher lost the case and was required to pay \$15,000 in punitive and compensatory damages as well as attorney fees (Zirkel, 1997). Even though the accommodation was listed on an individualized education plan rather than an individualized accommodation plan, the ramifications for general educators who do not comply with the law are becoming evident in the courts.

The current research on Section 504 primarily addresses the legalities of the Section 504 process; comparisons of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to Section 504; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and specific accommodations and modifications that may be incorporated into a student’s individual accommodation plan. There is a limited amount of research available that addresses the perceptions of the stakeholders involved in the Section 504 process. The purpose of this research study was to extend what is known about Section 504 and its implementation in middle schools from the perspective of teachers, parents, and Section 504 coordinators.

Method

Participants and Setting

This was a qualitative study of 10 individuals (four parents, three teachers and three Section 504 Coordinators) who had direct experience with the Section 504 process in the middle school setting. The participants were selected using purposeful sampling procedures (Miles and Huberman, 1994; McMillan and Schumacher, 2006).

The parents were selected for the study based on three criteria. First, their child had to be diagnosed with a disability such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, or central auditory processing disorder. The reason for choosing the diagnoses of attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and central auditory processing disorder was that these conditions are often considered to be “hidden disabilities” and accommodations are directly related to the child’s ability to learn. The second selection criteria was that the children of these parents were of middle school age and were currently in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade. The final selection criteria were that an individual accommodation plan had been written for their child while in middle school. Two of the four parent participants were chosen from the state Parent to Parent network. During the initial interviews with these two parents, they identified two other parents who had children that met the criteria. One of the parent participants had a son who was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder and fine motor difficulties, two parents had sons who were diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, and one parent had a daughter who was diagnosed with central auditory processing disorder.

Teacher participants were selected from a list provided by the school principals. Three criteria were used to select three teachers for this study. First, they needed to have at least five years of teaching experience in the middle school setting. Second, teachers were chosen who had experience with the Section 504 process and had taught students with a variety of disabilities (including those with attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and central auditory processing disorder). Third, the teachers chosen for the study had experience teaching at different middle grade levels. All of the teachers chosen for this study had over 20 years of teaching experience with experience teaching at the elementary level as well as the middle school level.

Three Section 504 coordinators were selected based on two criteria. First, they needed to have had at least five years experience completing the duties as a Section 504 coordinator; second, they had to be currently serving students at different middle schools in the school district. All of the Section 504 coordinators were also school counselors for different middle schools in the district where the study was conducted. Two of the counselors had previous teaching experience at the middle school level.

The setting for this study was a community in the Midwest with a population of approximately 49,000 that housed four middle schools. Each of the four middle schools had a designated 504 coordinator.

Analysis

This study implemented design and analysis methods described in Creswell (2002), Lincoln and Gruba (1985) and Miles and Huberman (1994). Interviewing was the primary means of collecting data for this study. To gain information from the participants, an interview guide containing open-ended questions was developed and used for each group of participants (Kvale, 1996). The interview guide was used as a tool during the interview process as well as a means for taking and organizing field notes. Questions from the interview guide ranged from demographic information about the participants to knowledge of and experience with the Section 504 process. Samples of interview questions included:

1. What is your understanding of a Section 504 individual accommodation plan?
2. What do you see as the (teacher's role, parent's role, Section 504 coordinator's role) in developing and implementing the individual accommodation plan?
3. How does the team share information about children on individual accommodation plans?
4. Can you describe how the individual accommodation plan is reviewed?
5. How do you know if the plan is working?

6. How would you respond to the following statement "A major purpose of Section 504 individual accommodation plans is to level the playing field for students with disabilities?"
7. As a (parent, teacher, Section 504 coordinator), what would make the Section 504 process easier for you?
8. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being very comfortable and 10 being not comfortable at all) what is your comfort level of teaching students with the following disabilities: ADD/ADHD, CAPD?
9. What are your experiences about communication between you and others regarding individual accommodation plans?
10. In your opinion do you feel that Section 504 plans are effective? Why or why not?

After obtaining written permission from the participants to audiotape, each participant was interviewed on two separate occasions with each session lasting 50-90 minutes. Field notes were also taken during the interviews. During the first interview session, participants were asked to describe their personal histories and to describe their experiences with the Section 504 process. During the second interview, clarification of data from the first interview was gathered and additional questions not covered during the first interview were posed (Seidman, 1998). The researcher transcribed each interview verbatim.

In addition to the interview data, two of the four parent participants provided copies of their child's individual accommodation plan for analysis. Three of the four parents also provided copies of correspondence (e.g., hand written notes, email, formal letters) they had received from the school. Analysis of the correspondence included two hand-written notes from teachers, a copy of one electronic mail and one formal letter. Available correspondence between school personnel and parents and available copies of individual accommodation plans were used to verify that the information shared in the parent

interviews was accurate.

Using the Ethnograph v5.0 for Windows™ program, text segments from the transcripts were coded and categorized using analytic induction and constant comparative procedures as described in Creswell (2002) and Lincoln and Gruba (1985).

Validity in the data collection data analysis was achieved through utilization of several strategies. Interviewing individuals representing the three different groups (e.g., parent, teacher, and Section 504 Coordinator) to gain a broad perspective of the Section 504 process was a key aspect to obtaining multiple perspectives. During the interviewing process, clarification techniques were implemented (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and participants were asked to review their interview transcripts for accuracy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In addition to the interview data, available correspondence documents between school personnel and parents and individual accommodation plans were used to verify that the information obtained in the interviews was accurate.

An audit trail outlining the research process and the development of codes, categories, and themes was maintained (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The audit trail for this study consisted of chronological research activities, identifying the researchers' pre-conceptualizations, interviews, initial coding efforts, and analysis of data.

Results

Once the interviewed data was analyzed, seven themes emerged that fell under three broad categories: a) Understanding of the Section 504 Process; b) Inconsistency of Section 504 Implementation; and c) Barriers to Collaborative Efforts. Each of the seven themes will be discussed under its related category, along with the interview data supporting it.

Understanding of the Section 504 Process

The following three themes related to understanding of the Section 504 process:

1. There is a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Section 504 Coordinator.
2. Parents know their child best.
3. Teachers have had little to no training on the Section 504 process.

Theme One: *There Is a Lack of Understanding of the Roles and Responsibilities of the Section 504 Coordinator.* According to Richards (1994) the Section 504 Coordinator should be responsible to develop and maintain a Section 504 program, distribute the necessary documentation and information to all campuses, and oversee the progress of all Section 504 committees. Additionally, Section 504 Coordinators should provide training to school personnel who are involved in the process of designing and implementing the

individual accommodation plan for students. They should also keep current on the legality issues regarding Section 504 and handle parent complaints, coordinate responses to the Office of Civil Rights and make necessary arrangements for due process hearings. The research data revealed that the parents and teachers did not have a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the Section 504 Coordinator in the development and implementation of individual accommodation plans.

One parent shared his perception about the role of the Section 504 coordinator by saying, *“I thought he was going to monitor Jason’s progress or make some recommendations as to what would help him. Of course, we never heard anything. The only interaction we had was when we initiated it”*.

In a separate interview, one teacher shared her thoughts about the role of the Section 504 coordinator. She stated, *“All he does is gives us the copies of the 504s at the beginning of the year and he takes them back at the end of the year”*. Another teacher talked about the role of the Section 504 coordinator at her school by saying, *“The counselor for sixth grade would be our 504 coordinator. I think that their only role is to get all the papers and divide them up into the classroom. I think that is all that they do is to make sure that 504s are separated between the classrooms and that they are all even....”*.

Two out of the four parents and one of the three teachers did not know who the Section 504 coordinator was for their middle school. When asked who was the Section 504 coordinator for her school, one teacher replied, *“Oh, I don’t know who that is. As far as I am concerned, it is all on my back”*.

Theme Two: Parents Know Their Child Best. Research has shown that parents are considered to be “experts” about their children and want to do what is best for them (Friend & Cook, 2003; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2001). Parents of children with disabilities have an understanding of the accommodations and modifications that have and have not worked in the past and want to take a proactive approach by communicating the strengths and needs of their child to the teachers.

The data from the interviews revealed that parents were able to identify areas of concern about their child’s ability to learn. They described the potential academic challenges or problems that their child most likely would face during the school year. One mother stated the following about her son, *“He is very aware of himself and not aware of others socially...he doesn’t notice any cues from other people and he has been invasive and impulsive. If he sees something that he wants, then he touches it”*.

At the beginning of the school year, one parent wrote a letter to her child’s teachers outlining the strategies that have worked in the past. She gave each teacher a copy of the letter at the meeting to discuss her son’s individual accommodation plan. She stated, *“In seventh grade, I wrote a letter to his teachers. I wrote...this is what you can expect from my child and these are the ways that I’ve learned are efficient in dealing with him. Like when you can’t get his attention, tap his desk or touch him on the shoulder. It’s*

unobtrusive and it works. Most of the teachers that were there just smiled, nodded, and set it aside. I had one teacher who sat there during this meeting and read the entire letter. You know, he aced that class...he flunked the other classes. I don't think they really understand the condition...I don't think they take the time to learn about it".

Theme Three: *Teachers Have Had Little to No Training on the Section 504 Process.*

The third theme that emerged related to understanding addressed the issue of training on Section 504. The three teachers and three Section 504 coordinators reported that they received no training on the Section 504 process in their pre-service teacher preparation programs. One teacher stated, *"I don't even remember hearing about those [referring to 504 individual accommodation plans]."* A Section 504 coordinator shared his thoughts on the pre-service training he received regarding Section 504. He stated, *"When I graduated, I never heard the word 504 out there [referring to the university's education and counseling programs]"*.

The data also revealed that the teachers were expected to execute the case management duties for a student on an individual accommodation plan; however, they received little to no training on the process. One teacher stated, *"The most that we have gotten is a new 504 plan form, a new 504 template. I haven't had any training on it at all. I think I knew more about it in elementary school when I was on the TAT...but that's 10 years ago. I haven't seen anything on 504s in middle school"*. One of the three teachers reported that several years earlier, she had the opportunity to attend a district sponsored in-service training on Section 504. She shared her thoughts about the training she received, *"There were just a few of us that were chosen to go. And then no follow-up, so I have lost all of that information. Good meeting; but now that I have been here longer, it would mean a little more to me. I would have more to connect it to. I wish I could go back to it. Boy, there were some things that we should have known and we didn't. Not only because it is the law but just who should be at the 504 [meeting] and who shouldn't"*.

In contrast, all three of the Section 504 coordinators shared that they attended several Section 504 training sessions. One Section 504 Coordinator stated, *"I've probably attended three or four different trainings. The Office of Civil Rights out of Denver sent someone here. I went through three or four of those where it was a day-long training. They go through the whole process. They went over everything from how it differs from 94-142 to what qualifies for a 504. We were given an issue and then expected to write up a 504 plan"*.

The need for on-going training opportunities on the Section 504 process supported the findings of Miller and Newbill (2006) and Blazer (1999). Reid, Maag, Vasa and Wright (1994) concurred that to meet Section 504 mandates, general education teachers need access to ongoing training opportunities on the Section 504 process and the development of appropriate accommodations for students who have attention deficit disorder.

Inconsistency of Section 504 Implementation

Two themes emerged related to inconsistency of Section 504 implementation.

1. The development, implementation, and periodic review of individual accommodation plans are inconsistent.
2. Transition of students on individual accommodation plans from one grade to another is often problematic.

Theme One: *The Development, Implementation, and Periodic Review of Individual Accommodation Plans Are Inconsistent.* The data from the study revealed that the elements of the Section 504 process varied greatly depending on the student needs, level of parent advocacy, middle school procedures and the grade level team. One mother shared her experience when an individual accommodation plan was written for her son midway through the first half of the sixth grade semester. She stated:

“Sixth grade was his first year on a 504. They [sixth grade teachers] had decided that he had really lost control and put him on a 504. I learned after the fact that they put him on a 504. There never was a meeting; it was just the teachers. I think it is a systems issue. It’s put on teachers’ laps and they are told to deal with it. They have no training and they don’t know what they are doing. It comes across as a real bother to them”. Another mother talked about her experience at an individual education plan (IEP) meeting when her daughter was moved from an IEP to an individual accommodation plan. She stated, “They said to me that, based on the results of the tests, we are going to move her to a 504. She [the case manager] said basically it is the same thing. They told me that because she did so well she no longer could be on an IEP. It’s a regulation kind of thing. It [the individual accommodation plan] was already typed up, they handed it to me, and I signed it. I wished I had never signed it”.

Typically, the teacher who assumes the case management responsibilities for the individual accommodation plans are responsible to rewrite an existing plan. The data revealed that the periodic review of the individual accommodation plan in the school district was completed in a number of ways. Some middle school teams review the plan within the first month of the beginning of school, some teams review the plan at fall parent teacher conferences, some teams update the plan and mail it to the parents for their signature and some teams review the plan on the anniversary date of the original plan. One of the teachers stated, *“We don’t really rewrite, we revisit [the individual accommodation plan] at the first conference time. We pull it out and visit with the parent and double check. Are you still doing this? Does this seem current? We update the medicine if there is medicine...and if they [the parents] think that the 504 plan is still correct for their child, we’ll check continuation and have them sign off on it”.* Another teacher described how she updates the individual accommodation plan. She stated, *“We have to review every 504 in the fall and make any modifications as necessary or to say as is but we do a formal review. There’s a form that you fill out and we go through the form step by step. Go over all of the accommodations. I like to wait a good month before we do this so we get to know the child a little bit in the classroom. We just go over how they are*

doing, what kind of challenges they are having and most of the time there are modifications and we work toward student responsibility”.

The level of input from parents also varies depending on the team. One mother stated, “*On February 20, 2003, I got a copy of a revised 504 plan in the mail. Nobody had ever contacted me or talked to me about it other than at conferences*”. Another parent stated, “*They [referring to the team members] wrote down the accommodations but I didn’t have any input*”.

Theme Two: *Transition of Students on Individual Accommodation Plans From One Grade to Another Is Often Problematic.* The transition to middle school can be a source of concern for all parents. During the adolescent years, teens are dramatically changing physically and emotionally. They begin to spend more time with their peers, they want less guidance from adults, they increase their interactions with opposite sex peers, and they place more importance on participation in large social groups (Cole & Cole, 1996). During this time, parents often find themselves in a quandary about finding the balance of providing support to their child and encouraging independence (Felber, 1997; Tubman & Lerner, 1994). The concerns of parents who have students with a disability are exemplified during the transition process. At the middle school level, there is a wider variety of staff to work with, students are expected to change classes, contact time with teachers decreases dramatically, and parents may be unsure of whom to contact with concerns about their child (O’Shea et al., 2001).

The data from the study revealed that parents and teachers share similar concerns about transferring individual accommodation plans during the transition process. This process may be from elementary school to middle school, from grade to grade, or from middle school to high school. One mother stated, “*We thought it (Section 504 individual accommodation plan) would transfer from one grade to another. That’s what surprised us. I guess we never pushed it in seventh grade. The 504 plan didn’t do much in sixth grade. We didn’t see much happening with it so we just individually talked with the teachers*”. Another mother shared her thoughts about the transition to the next grade level and teachers following through with providing accommodations for her child. She stated, “*Usually in the fall right after school starts they review the 504. I don’t know if it is school specific because this is not the way it went in elementary school. At the end of seventh grade, someone came up with a really good idea that they have one of the paras check his planner at night and make sure that he had his assignments written down and that he had everything that he needed to do his homework. That came to work better. Before the beginning of the next school year, I asked the team to do the same thing as last year and I was told no; they couldn’t do that. They didn’t have the manpower to do that and it took too much time out of their day....”.*

One teacher shared that the transition of students on individual accommodation plans from elementary to middle school is not a smooth process. She stated, “*It’s not a real*

smooth process, to be honest with you, coming from elementary to middle school. Oftentimes it's like there is nobody in charge of these 504 kids. The classroom teacher is really the case manager for them but they sometimes get lost in the shuffle during the transition from elementary to middle school". Another teacher shared that she did not know, until after fall parent teacher conferences, that one of her students had ADHD and an individual accommodation plan. After talking with the parents about the difficulties the student was having in the classroom with work completion, the parents shared several of the accommodations that were written the previous year.

Barriers to Collaborative Efforts

For the purposes of this study, collaboration referred to the beliefs and attitudes of parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators as well as the written and oral communication between those involved in the Section 504 process. Two themes emerged under this category:

1. Barriers to collaborative efforts between parents and teachers exist.
2. Communication between parents and teachers.

Theme One: *Barriers to Collaborative Efforts Between Parents and Teachers Exist.* Two primary barriers to collaborative efforts between parents and teachers emerged from the data. These barriers are perceptions of students with disabilities and lack of time. Research has shown that collaboration and communication between parents and teachers at the middle school level are critical elements to the success for all students (Brost, 2000; Clark & Clark, 1996; George & Shewey, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000). This is even more crucial when students are known to have a disability. A collaborative orientation implies that no one operates in isolation. Teachers who espouse a collaborative philosophy are sensitive to the family's needs and strengths, teach based on what they know about their students, and encourage learning in the general education classroom (O'Shea et al., 2001). The time needed for teachers and parents to collaborate is often seen as a barrier and needs to be supported by the school administration (Friend & Cook, 2003).

All participants were asked to respond to the following statement: "A major purpose of Section 504 is for teachers to level the playing field for students with disabilities." Nine out of the 10 participants generally agreed with the statement. One mother stated, "*We don't necessarily need to make things easier for these kids but we need to make it possible. They need to learn how to deal with their disabilities because it is a life-long thing for most of them. You are not doing them any favors by giving their education to them but you have to make it possible for them to succeed at least partially*".

After some thought, one teacher disagreed with the statement and explained her position by saying, "Kids are not all the same...I think it is about helping them to be as successful as they can be...so that is not level. It's not about teaching to the middle; it's not about this one level and that everybody is at it and you are trying to get everyone to it. People are all over the place and, to me, it is about helping them to be the best that they can".

Parents and teachers reported that it is challenging to identify the appropriate accommodations that will assist the student in the school environment. They struggle with finding the balance between assisting and enabling. One teacher stated, *“Probably the biggest challenge is with parents. I am thinking of a specific child now. Parents who want to do the work for the child, who use the disability as a crutch and excuse...the challenge is how much is disability and how much is enabling, and communicating that to the parents”*.

Parents, teachers, and Section 504 coordinators reported that the accommodations and modifications made for students with these diagnoses are often very basic. Examples of accommodations or modification included: takes medication, has preferential seating, is placed in a classroom with a sound system, has tests read, or is provided modified assignments. This “cookbook” approach in the development of individual accommodation plans for students does not provide the opportunity to really understand the learning needs of the student. In some situations, the emphasis is placed on completing the form rather than problem solving and figuring out what will truly help the student succeed. Conderman and Katsiyannis (1995), and Stainback, Stainback, and Forest (1989) caution those who are involved in the development of individual accommodation plans to determine appropriate accommodations and services based on the student’s educational needs and not on the student’s label.

The issue of lack of time was another barrier that emerged from the data. Parents shared that they were told that there simply was not enough time in a teacher’s schedule to provide some of the accommodations that were suggested. One parent talked about having her daughter’s planner signed by the teachers. She stated *“I have a friend who lives in another city and at the end of the day the teacher goes through and checks everything that should be done in the planner. If it is not done then there is a big red stamp that is put on the planner. I have asked for that and the teachers said that would be a lot of trouble for them to do that; but, on the other hand, when I go to meetings, they know exactly what is missing. Can’t they send something home? When they know someone is struggling, can’t they do something? I called a meeting a few times. I called once but nobody could get together and nothing ever happened. I asked for one toward the end of the semester”*.

All teachers and Section 504 coordinators spoke about the lack of time available to complete all of the school related tasks required of them. One teacher suggested that one person needs to be allotted time to follow through with the responsibilities for the Section 504 process at each grade level. She stated, *“Have one person that is in charge of all of them. It would kind of take the headache off all the extra paperwork of the teachers. If you had one person who was in charge of all the sixth grade 504s, seventh grade 504s, and eighth grade 504s, they could be in charge of making sure that they are rewritten...talk to the parents...make the contacts...follow up on the kids. [This person] could meet with the kids to see how things are going. It would be nice if there could be just one person to check on those kids because they are the ones that fall through the cracks. They’d have to have the time and they would need be trained in what to do”*.

Theme Two: Communication Between Parents and Teachers. The data revealed that parents were discouraged about the meetings that were held regarding their child's performance. One parent stated, *"The meeting itself is kind of overwhelming because you are with all of these people. It is not like in elementary school where everything stays pretty much the same in the classroom. I can't tell them what to do. I can only listen to them tell me. We have such a short period of time because they always have to get to the next class"*.

Parents consistently reported that ongoing communication throughout the school year with their child's teachers is inconsistent and they often feel "out of the loop". They are unsure about assignment completion, upcoming projects, and grades received for work and tests. All of the parents in this study reported that, unless they take the initiative to contact the teachers, the only time teachers communicated with them is during parent teacher conferences or if there was a major behavioral incident involving their child. One parent stated, *"I've never had a note; I've never been called this year. We wouldn't have been called except for that weird incident"*.

Teachers also described their concerns about communication with parents. One teacher talked about a situation when the parents decided to take their daughter off medication for attention deficit disorder and anxiety without telling the teacher. She stated, *"They [the parents] let us know a month and a half later. We could notice it and we knew that something was different. She was a little more energetic, a little more outgoing, and also a little more defiant. We brought it up at conferences. It was oh, well, we decided we would try it without medicine. It would have been nice to know. I hate it when they don't tell us. Sometimes they'll say we just wanted to see if you'd notice"*.

Both teachers and Section 504 coordinators expressed their concerns about parents who attend meetings with a long list of accommodations that the teachers are expected to make for the student. One Section 504 Coordinator stated, *"Some parents will call with a very unreasonable request. Well, we don't have to honor it just because a parent wants it. I mean 504 is a team. It's the teachers and a parent. If the parent wants it and five teachers say no, it's not going to happen"*. One teacher shared one experience she had with a parent. She stated, *"Some of them come in with a laundry list. This one parent had it all typed up. In the form of a 504, just like we were going to adopt her list and that is inappropriate. To me, that is aggressive. We took each point and talked it over and talked to the student. We took a piece of hers and tried to use her language and then tried to make something we could live with and that we were comfortable with...it was a very tense meeting"*.

Implications

Results of this investigation provide some insight into the development, implementation and review of a Section 504 individual accommodation plan. School district administration needs to better define system-wide policies and procedures regarding the

steps in the Section 504 process, the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process, and procedures to transition students from one grade to another. To promote communicative efforts, parents need to be updated on the Section 504 policies and procedures on a yearly basis.

As teachers in the school district assume the case management responsibilities for students on individual accommodation plans, they need to be afforded training opportunities to learn about the development, implementation, and periodic review of individual accommodation plans for students who qualify under Section 504. In addition, the training should include information on attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity and central auditory processing disorder.

University teacher training programs must provide pre-service students with opportunities to learn how to design and implement Section 504 individual accommodation plans for students with disabilities. Pre-service students also need to have a basic understanding of appropriate accommodations and adaptations that may be provided for students who have a diagnosis of attention deficit disorder and central auditory processing disorder.

At the beginning of each school year, teachers need to listen and hear what parents are telling them about the accommodations and modifications that have been successful for the child during the previous years. This is not to say that teachers are going to implement all previously tried accommodations and modifications. Rather, it is about valuing the experiences and opinions of parents and using that information to develop an individual accommodation plan that will provide the student with the opportunity to succeed in school. Each plan should be reviewed and rewritten to accommodate the students' maturation while taking into account different teaching styles, schedules, and classes. The team should avoid using a "cookbook" approach when determining the accommodations and modifications that should be written into the plan. The plan needs to be individualized based on firsthand knowledge and observations from those who actually know the student.

Communication must be a continuous process throughout the school year. Ongoing collaboration between the parents of children with attention deficit disorder and central auditory processing disorder and teachers is crucial to the success of each student. These students are often at risk for academic failure because of poor self-concept, difficulty with social interactions with peers, and lack of motivation. The more isolated students feel from their school community, the less motivated they will be to succeed in that environment. To reduce the risk of school failure, parents and teachers need to make a concerted effort to develop a collaborative relationship with each other that will foster ongoing communication about the student's academic progress throughout the school year.

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