
School Panel Results

TARA TAFT

During an interactive panel discussion on schools and eating gluten free during our October event, “Managing Celiac in the School Environment,” many audience members asked questions regarding 504 plans. Panel members included: Janis Arnold, LICSW, Clinical Social Worker at Boston Children’s Hospital; Cheryl Judd, Food Service Director of Wayland Public Schools; Dascha Weir, M.D., pediatric gastroenterologist; Sabrina Couture, N.P., nurse at Reliant Medical Group and volunteer at Camp Celiac; and Robin McLafferty, CSG Board Member and mother of a daughter with celiac disease.



Following are answers to a few of the questions the panel received.

What is a 504 Plan?

Section 504 is part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and applies to all institutions receiving federal financial assistance, such as public schools. Under this law, public schools must provide a free appropriate public education, without discrimination, to disabled students. This law acknowledges that the disability may not require special education services, but a plan is needed to ensure the student receives an appropriate education accommodating the disability within the classroom. This law must accommodate a special diet.

To request a 504 Plan, parents need to speak with the 504 Coordinator in their school and submit a note from their child’s doctor. The note should clearly state the disease, symptoms and necessary precautions/accommodations. Without a doctor’s note, the school can deny your request. A meeting will then be arranged for the plan to be developed.

The document for the plan generally includes an explanation of the student’s disability and lists specific accommodations that will need to be made. For the student with celiac disease, accommodations should cover the general areas of: health department, classroom, art room, and food services.

My school’s vice principal is trying to get rid of 504 plans and move to a “Health Plan.” He told parents we’re doing away with 504 plans. What is the difference?

A 504 Plan is a legal document. A Health Plan is not legally binding.

What do I need to do to make sure my child qualifies for a 504 Plan?

A diagnosis of celiac disease qualifies the child for a 504 Plan.

Can my school district ask me for a new doctor’s note, even if I’ve already given them one in the past?

Yes.

My son was recently diagnosed, but his school nurse is resisting our requests to create a 504 Plan. What should we do?

Go to the school’s administration.

Besides food, is there anything else I should include in my child’s 504 Plan?

Since many art supplies, including play dough and papier mâché, may contain gluten, it is a good idea to incorporate

art supplies, as well as field trips, the classroom and lunch (food services) into the 504 Plan.

How do I go about writing a 504 Plan?

Start with a note from your child’s doctor (pediatrician or gastroenterologist) that states that your child was diagnosed with celiac disease. Then contact the 504 Plan Coordinator at your child’s school (often the school guidance counselor or nurse) and request a meeting. The school may have a form to complete. Be prepared to detail exactly what you want in the plan.

More information regarding 504 Plans are detailed in the School Packet available to download on our website: www.childrenshospital.org/ceciac. To find it, click on Patient Resources.