

# School Accommodations for Students with Dwarfism

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## The Law and Your Child

### *Section 504*

- Part of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Prevents discrimination against individuals with disabilities from any institution that receives federal funds, including schools
- Students that are not eligible for services under IDEA but have a condition that may affect their ability to function in school may qualify for accommodations under Sec. 504
- Under Section 504, a disability is defined as any impairment, physical or mental, that substantially limits a major life activity.

(Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2007)

### *Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)*

- Originally signed into law as part of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975
- IDEA was most recently amended in 2004
- Categories of disability that qualify for services under IDEA include: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional impairments, hearing impairments, cognitive impairments, multiple disabilities, physical or orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairments
- Provides for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to all eligible students regardless of severity of disability

(Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2007)

## Section 504 Plan

- Students may be referred for services by teachers or parents
- Once referred, the school must conduct an evaluation to determine if and what services the student is eligible to receive
- Eligibility is based on professional judgment rather than tests
- The law does not provide funding for services
- The law does require the school to create a written plan that explains the accommodations the student is to receive and requires the school to provide an accessible environment
- 504 Plans may include: a statement of the student's strengths and weaknesses, a list of accommodations to be implemented, and the person responsible for implementing the services
- Accommodations are usually inexpensive, common-sense modifications

(Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2007)

## Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- Main principles of IDEA include:
  - **Zero reject:** requires that no child with a disability be excluded from a public education
  - **Nondiscriminatory testing:** schools must use a variety of unbiased tests to determine eligibility and must be given in the student's native language
  - **Free and appropriate public education (FAPE):** Students eligible for services must have an individualized education program (IEP) detailing their needs, accommodations, services, goals, and objectives
  - **Least-restrictive environment (LRE):** eligible students are entitled to be education with their nondisabled peers to the greatest extent possible
  - **Due process:** Must be followed in all placement decisions and changes in placement. Records must be kept and are confidential and parents must be involved in the process of planning and making placements. Parents have the right to dispute plan
  - **Parent participation:** schools must collaborate with parents in the design and implementation of services
  - **Transition services, early childhood education (from birth on), and assessment participation** are also included
- Schools do receive some funding to aid in cost of providing services
- Schools must provide services and accommodations listed in a student's IEP. Records are kept and annual reviews are held to make sure IEP continues to meet the needs of the student

(Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2007)

## How Does a Student with Dwarfism Qualify for Services?

- Most students found eligible under IDEA either qualify under *physical or orthopedic impairments* or under *other health impairments* depending on the student's physical limitations, mobility issues, and other medical issues such as chronic pain, increased absences due to surgeries and other medical appointments, etc. These medical issues may interfere with a student's ability to fully function in the classroom without accommodations
- A doctor's diagnosis is necessary to be found eligible for services due to physical or other health impairments under IDEA
- Students that just require some modifications to the physical environment may just qualify for services under Section 504
- Parents have the right to due process if they disagree with the school district's decisions regarding: eligibility, the outcome of the evaluation, the placement of the child, or any other aspect regarding their child's right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE)
- Due process may include mediation or a due process hearing

## What is the First Step in Planning for my Child?

- Contact your local school district once your child has been diagnosed. Every state has early childhood education services available beginning at birth and your school district can give you the necessary contact information. Some programs include: speech and language classes, physical therapy, occupational therapy, adaptive physical education classes, and play groups. If eligible for physical therapy, check with your doctor about appropriate activities and expectations for therapy.
- Contact your district's Department of Special Education and inform them when your child will be beginning school. If possible, provide them with information about your child's form of dwarfism and of possible accommodations your child may require.
- If your child will be entering a new school (pre-school, kindergarten, middle school, high school), try to tour that building at the end of the preceding school year to see which accommodations may be required. Some modifications require more work than others and this gives the school time to make those adjustments.
- When touring the building, have your child walk through a typical day to see where accommodations may be needed. It is helpful if the principal, the teacher or teachers, and, if possible, the district's occupational therapist walk through with you.

## Who Should be Involved in the Planning Process?

- Depending on the needs of your child, these are some of the people that may be involved in the planning process:
  - The student
  - The parents
  - The general education teacher(s)
  - The special education teacher(s)
  - The school psychologist
  - Counselors
  - Speech/language therapists
  - Physical therapist
  - Occupational therapist
  - The Director of Special Education
  - Social workers
  - The principal
  - Other service providers (such as adaptive physical education teachers, sign language interpreters, mobility specialists, etc)

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations

### 1. Getting to School:

- **Walking or car riding:** Find out the procedure for dropping off student and entering building. Make sure child has safe passage through parking lot, cross walks, and has access to sidewalks (especially in winter when snow and ice may cause a problem)
  - ❖ **Possible accommodations:** an aide, crossing guard, walking buddy
- **Riding the bus:** Depending on the size of your child, their mobility issues, their neck stability and their medical status, special transportation may be required. Provisions for carrying scooters or wheelchairs may need to be considered. The height of the steps and the step down onto the curb or street may be too high
  - ❖ **Possible accommodations:** a bus with a wheelchair lift or storage capacity for carrying a scooter, a stool for maneuvering the steps, a seat belt or a car seat to protect neck from sudden stops, bumps, or curves
- Even if your child won't be riding a bus, it is important to have these accommodations (if they are needed) written into their plan for when they go on field trips

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



Getting on the bus



An In-Seat car seat



Buckling in

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations

### 2. The Morning Routine:

- What do the children do and where do they go before school begins?
- Can they easily access the area they are to wait in? Can they open doors, walk the distance they may need to, carry all the stuff they may need to carry?
- ❖ Possible accommodations: handicapped accessible door openers (at a reachable level), paved walk ways that are kept clean of snow and ice, a place to drop off their things if not allowed to enter the classroom and if backpack, etc is too heavy to carry around for long period of times

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



Drop off area



Playground

This school requires all children to go out on the playground before school. It is about 1/8 of a mile from the drop off area, around the side of the building, and to the playground. When the student's backpack is too heavy, when her hips or ankles hurt, or when there is a lot of snow and ice, she has permission to cut through the school and to drop off her stuff in the office or in her class on the way outside.

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



Make sure child can easily open every door in and out of the building. If the door is too heavy, make sure the child can easily reach the handicap accessible button. This may require the school to lower the button or to provide a permanent step to help them reach.

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations

### 3. Touring the classroom:

- Make sure your child can access their locker or coat hook
- ❖ Possible accommodations: a lowered handle and lock for the locker door, a lowered shelf and hooks in the locker, the use of two lockers (one for coat, boots, and one for books), a lowered coat hook, a designated space in the classroom for your child to store their things
- Make sure your child can sit comfortably at their desk. Their back should be touching the back rest of the chair, their feet should be touching the floor or foot rest, and their body should be at the appropriate height so they don't have to reach or strain their neck and shoulder muscles to write
- ❖ Possible accommodations: a lowered desk and chair, seat cushions and a foot rest or stool, a specialized ergo-dynamic chair
- Make sure your child is able to move freely around the classroom and can reach necessary materials
- ❖ Possible accommodations: wider aisles if your child uses a wheelchair or scooter, materials put on lowered shelves, a designated area for their materials

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



A lowered coat hook



A home made cushion and stool



The Tripp Trapp Chair: an adjustable chair good for special classes like art and computers



Ergo Chair for little people with adjustable height, back support, and foot support

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations

### 4. Touring the rest of the school:

- Make sure child can access bathroom doors, toilets, light switches, sinks, paper towel dispensers, mirrors, drinking fountains
- ❖ Possible accommodations: handicap accessible openers on doors, light switch extenders, automatic light switches, lowered paper towel, soap dispensers, and mirrors, stools or steps wherever needed

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



Handicap accessible doors



Stools in all public areas



Light switch extenders

Lowered paper towel dispensers and mirrors



Motion sensitive light switches





## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations

### 5. The Cafeteria

- Make sure child can move independently through the lunch line and salad bar
- ❖ Possible accommodations: steps or stool leading up to counter, a riser that runs the length of the counter, a lunch buddy to help them reach items
- Make sure child can reach materials such as condiments, napkins, utensils, etc.
- ❖ Possible accommodations: stools, a lowered table where items are placed
- Make sure child can sit comfortable at the table
- ❖ Possible accommodations: a special table and chair (allow friends to sit at table with them too), stools and cushions, an adjustable chair

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



Trays are put on lowered shelf



Salad bar is lowered



Condiments and utensils put on lowered table

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations

### 6. Special classes

- Make sure child's chair and desk/table are appropriate
- ❖ Possible accommodations: same as in classroom
- Make sure materials are within reach
- ❖ Possible accommodations: stools, put materials on low shelves, put student's materials in a designated, accessible space
- In gym, notify teacher about your child's capabilities and limitations
- ❖ Possible accommodations: adaptive physical education classes, allowing your child to sit out when tired, adapting general physical education curriculum to accommodate all students

## Making the Tour and Examples of Accommodations



Accessible library



Alternative instruments may be needed in music



Materials are within reach in art class

Comfortable seat in computers



Adaptive curriculum in gym lets her ride bike instead of run



## Other Considerations

- Due to fine motor skills and shape of hands, special pencils, crayons and scissors may be required
- Writing accommodations may need to be made. Some students may tape record their ideas and then transcribe later; some may have a scribe write for them; some may use a computer or Alpha Smart or some other word processor
- Extra time may be required for writing tasks
- Extra time may be required for pass time in the hallways and an aide or a walking buddy may be helpful in navigating safely through the halls
- For older students, an extra set of text books to keep at home helps to alleviate the stress on the body caused from heavy backpacks

## Other Considerations

- Remember to go through safety drills (fire, tornado, lockdown, etc) to see if any accommodations need to be made in these areas
- Tour the playground and work with the school and your doctor to know what activities are safe for the student to participate in (may need lowered swings, climbing restrictions, wheelchair accessible play structures, paved areas and walkways)
- Any classroom or school accommodation should accompany the student at any school sponsored before or after-school program
- If the student occasionally suffers from aches and pains, keep medicine such as Motrin or doctor-prescribed pain relievers as well as a heating pad or ice packs in the office. Check with the school about the proper procedures for doing this.

## Other Considerations

- The accommodations mentioned in this presentation are based on a variety of experiences. Please remember not all children will have the same needs and therefore will not need the same accommodations
- Allow your child to be involved in planning the accommodations. Respect their wishes if they prefer not to use some of the accommodations mentioned
- Changes in your child's plan can always be made if your child's needs change
- School districts only have to provide *reasonable* accommodations that are of educational benefit

## Adaptive Equipment Resources

<http://www.adaptiveliving.com>: Resource for ergo dynamic chair and scooters

<http://www.dickblick.com/categories/specialneeds>: Resource for art supplies

<http://www.forsmallhands.com/store>: Resource for educational toys and life skill activities and items such as light switch extenders

<http://www.discountsschoolsupply.com/Product/ProductList.aspx?category=2632&keyword=>: Resource for adaptive products and school supplies for children with special needs

<http://www.datadesktech.com>: Resource for a variety of computer keyboards (smaller size, larger keys, etc)

## References

Mastropieri, Margo A., Scruggs, Thomas E. (2007). *The inclusive classroom: strategies for effective instruction*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.

[www.lpaonline.org](http://www.lpaonline.org): Little People of America website containing access to medical articles, parent and educational information, and online support groups

Information and ideas gathered from parent meetings, medical and psycho-social workshops, and educational workshops held at local, regional, and national conferences of Little People of America from 1999-2008

The experiences of the Wagonlander and Kartsounes Family