

# Preparing your Child's Teacher & School for their Needs

BY ANTHONY TANONA, PSY. D.

Many children who struggle in school do so because they have difficulties in one or a couple specific areas that affect their performance in many aspects of learning. Therefore, it is important for parents to get their children properly evaluated to assess what specific areas they struggle. If accommodations can be identified for them in these specific areas, interventions can then be put into place to mitigate for their difficulties to hopefully improve their overall functioning. This is typically done through an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan.

A 504 Plan refers to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. This Act indicated that individuals with disabilities cannot be excluded from participating in federally funded programs or activities, including school. As defined by the act, a disability is considered to be a, "physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities." A 504 Plan identifies the accommodations that will be necessary to allow the particular student to achieve to the same level as his/her peers. An Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) is the specifically written plan outlining the accommodations a student will receive. It is completed by a team of professionals and outlines the frequency, intensity, and specificity of the particular accommodations that the school will provide to the student.

## Children who may need an IEP or a 504 Plan include those with:

- Learning Disorders
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Lowered I.Q. or Processing Difficulties
- Psychological Disorders
- Autism or other Pervasive Developmental Disorders
- Hearing or Visual impairments
- Speech Impairments

Referrals for an IEP can come from a parent, teacher, or therapist who is concerned with a child's level of functioning or performance. The professionals on the evaluation team can include school personnel, psychologists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, vision or hearing specialists, etc. At this point a formal evaluation can be completed by a qualified individual such as a psychologist, speech pathologist, Optometrist, etc. It will be up to a child's parent or legal guardian to determine if their child should

be assessed. Results will be relayed to the appropriate school personnel who will examine the data and determine if a child qualifies for an IEP. A multi-disciplinary team meeting will then take place to determine the specific accommodations a child will receive. Parents are invited to this meeting, and can take an active part in it to advocate for accommodations and interventions for their child.

level, to strengthen skills. It is recommended to continue pleasure reading by setting aside a few minutes each day for this activity.

- Implementing a computer program that assists with phonetical abilities and/or reading comprehension and speed rate.
- If permissible, on tests not assessing his reading abilities, it is recommended that



*Goals are set to meet a child's specific needs on all plans put into place. Although all plans are individualized, here are some potential accommodations that may be written:*

## READING

- Enhancing sight-word vocabulary is recommended to increase student's ability to pronounce and understand additional words.
- Implementing a program that assists with reading comprehension.
- Student is encouraged to regularly and frequently review information that must be remembered. After reading, it is recommended that he be asked, or review by himself, specific comprehension questions assessing the meaning of words, sentences, paragraphs, and passages.
- Utilize highlighting skills to help student pick out and remember important aspects of reading passages.
- In addition to school-based interventions, the student should be encouraged to read on his/her own, at an appropriate

an individual be available to help define words and explain contextual meanings to the student.

- It is recommended that tests be administered orally.
- Based on his significant difficulty with phonics and learning new words, it is recommended that consideration be given to waiving the student's future foreign language requirements.

## WRITING

- It is believed that the student would benefit from intensive tutoring in sentence formation, knowledge of grammatical rules, and paragraph and essay structure.
- On tests, the use of a computer or a scribe may be beneficial to assist in written expression.
- Unless his spelling is being assessed, it is recommended that he not be penalized for poor spelling.
- The student should be encouraged to write on his own, at an appropriate level, to strengthen skills in this area.

## MATH

- Specialized in-class assistance and specific math tutoring is recommended.
- Student may benefit from additional practice in number facts.
- When appropriate, it is recommended that he be allowed the use of a calculator and/or multiplication chart to check his work.
- The incorporation of manipulatives and/or experiential techniques may make learning more tangible and salient.
- He should be encouraged to apply mathematical concepts to "real world" situations to strengthen his math skills and to improve retention and understanding.

## TUTORING

- It is recommended that student participate in tutoring to strengthen his reading, writing and math abilities.
- If possible, based on the nature of the instruction, allowing the student to participate in a discussion may increase his on-task behavior and level of comprehension.
- Have student repeat back information that he has heard or read to improve his level of comprehension and pronunciation.
- Utilize multisensory instruction and incorporate visual cues, visual information, or the use of manipulatives to supplement learning.
- Student is encouraged to review previously learned information before being introduced to new or related material.
- Simplify the language level of instructions and/or explanations when appropriate. If student does not understand an instruction, it may be beneficial to rephrase it.

## ADHD

- Placement in a structured academic setting with a small teacher to student ratio is recommended.
- Due to his inattention and lowered processing speed, extended time is recommended for all standardized testing and classroom examinations.
- During standardized testing, it is also recommended that he be provided with extra breaks and that he be allowed to complete the assessment in a distraction free environment.
- Shortened assignments, more frequent breaks, or the breaking up of work into smaller segments may be beneficial.
- When permissible, allowing him to stand up when completing tasks is recommended.
- Permitting student to take a brief break and walk around may be beneficial. Seating student near the teacher and positive role models may enhance his on task attention.

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- The utilization of visual aids or other multisensory techniques may be beneficial to help student understand information presented to him in a classroom setting.
- Providing instructions and information in multiple formats is recommended.

### BEHAVIORAL/EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES

- Utilizing an Individualized Behavioral Reinforcement Program to provide student with praise and rewards for positive behavior and school performance may be beneficial. As he progresses through school, where work will increase in intensity and amount, additional structure could help him achieve to his potential.
- Positive reinforcement should be provided to student for participation in academic activities. It may be beneficial to encourage and reinforce effort and positive attempts, as opposed to correct results, to help foster positive self-esteem in this area.
- Encourage student to implement his Safety Plan, which he will work on with his therapist or school counselor. Completing role plays in the classroom when peers are not present is recommended to increase his ability to implement it successfully and consistently.

Though some of the aforementioned accommodations may be beneficial for your child, it will be important to create an individualized IEP tailored to your child's strengths and weaknesses. In order to do this, it will be important to complete a thorough psychoeducational evaluation of your child to maximize you're the school's and your understanding of your child. If your child qualifies for an IEP, it will be important to know that your child's education is not only the responsibility of the school, but also of the parents. Therefore, it will be important to reinforce the important concepts and lessons taught by their school at home to ensure that they receive a comprehensive and specialized education.

*Dr. Anthony W. Tanona is a Licensed Psychologist and an Executive Director of Delta Psychological Group in Aventura, Florida. He specializes in the assessment and treatment of children, adolescents, and adults, specifically those with ADHD and other behavioral disorders, Learning Disabilities, depression, and anxiety. He completes Psychological Evaluations to test for ADHD, Learning Difficulties, and gifted placement. For a free phone consultation, or for other concerns, Dr. Tanona can be reached at (305) 933-5733 or at DrTanona@yahoo.com. TPN*



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