

**SECONDARY EDUCATORS KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTION OF SECTION 504
PLANS**

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Abstract

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In informal conversations to the research, students and their families reported 504 Plans going un- or underserved. As 504 Plans are legal documents, and the usage of them has increased since 2008, there is a need to understand why plans may not be fully implemented. The purpose of this research is to understand how educators conceptualize 504 Plans and how they are implemented (or not) based on educators' knowledge and experience. This was done by surveying and interviewing school personnel from a school district in Illinois. Based on this research, school personnel generally find accommodations reasonable and feel confident in implementing them, despite a lack of training. School personnel define mental health in different ways- from everyday interactions to crisis situations. Lastly, they believe the students play an important role in the success of 504 Plans. From this information I concluded that educators need more training, a more uniform and encompassing definition of mental health, and more research is needed to understand the students' perspective.

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Purpose and Positionality

The purpose of this research is to understand how educators conceptualize 504 Plans and how they are implemented (or not) based on educators' knowledge and experience. My interest in this work initially stemmed from informal conversations I had with three students and their families, who told me that 504 Plans were going unserved or underserved. This was surprising to me, as I have seen first hand the accommodations teachers create for students on an as-needed basis.

To try to understand this disconnect, I conducted a literature review. I found a wealth of information on 504 Plans. This included administrators' experience with 504 Plans as a whole, teacher knowledge of the 504 Plan process, factors in successful 504 Plans, and much more. Details of this research will be provided in the context section. However, there were also gaps I identified in the research including training on 504 Plans, educators' perspective on the feasibility of accommodations, educators' understanding of mental health, and a focus on qualitative work.

In this study, I aimed to fill those gaps by surveying school personnel from two schools (River and Grand¹) in Illinois and interviewing three educators from River High. I graduated from River High and was privileged to connect with the principal and gain permission to ask staff to participate in my research. While none of the participants remembered me, they knew my name/ younger brother who recently graduated from River High. Overall, I cannot be certain of the impact my alumni status had on my or the participants' reports.

Regardless, the sampling size and method is a limitation to this research. Convenience sampling, as used in this study, is limiting. Convenience sampling runs a high risk of biased information, and therefore not being representative of the population. The sample size was also

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

small (even for a qualitative study). Additionally, this research is limited to school personnels' perspective- a more well-rounded study would include information from students and/or parents.

One reason many educators turned down requests for survey responses/ interviews is because they are under more time constraints and expectations than usual, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A few educators responded via email that they could not participate because they were having to make frequent changes to the curriculum as they toggled between virtual, hybrid, and in-person learning. I cannot be certain of the full effect the pandemic has had on this research.

Even with careful planning and analysis, there were other potential threats and limitations to my study. For example, I enter this work with my own biases, particularly as a person with a lot of privileges; I am white, cisgender, and middle class. I start to address this by educating myself and searching for bias in my questions, research, and interpretations. To minimize this threat and others, I also used peer review; throughout the process, I worked with a team of students and professors to read and edit each other's work.

To limit these threats, I also worked to make sure that the surveys and interviews were in-depth, but also left the door open to ask follow-up questions as-needed. Both surveys and interviews were used to reach more participants and therefore more information and triangulation.

In this paper I write about my literature review, protocols, findings, analysis, interpretations, and finally suggestions for future research.

Background

In 1973 the Rehabilitation Act was put into law, prohibiting discrimination based on disability. From that, Section 504 was created; “section 504 is a broad civil rights law that protects individuals with disabilities to be allowed the opportunity to fully participate with their peers, to the extent possible, in any institution receiving federal funding” (Spiel, 2014). To qualify, a disability must create substantial limitations, in reference to students’ average peers. It is the responsibility of the student to establish the existence of a disability and prove that it is substantially limiting (Cole, 1995).

From Section 504, 504 Plans were created; a 504 Plan is a legal document that identifies learning barriers and the accommodations needed to remove them (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). It details the responsibilities of everyone involved to assure a student benefits from the provided learning experiences. A 504 Plan (unlike an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is designed to be implemented in the general education, elementary or secondary school setting. A 504 Plan can be created for physical or mental health² reasons (Sharbek, 2017).

Each school district has their own policies and practices regarding the 504 Plan process. However, there are general requirements and commonsense guidelines, as provided by Smith, 2002:

Steps in the 504 Process

- **Referral-** Schools are required to refer students who they think would be eligible for section 504 services. A committee of knowledgeable individuals will make that determination. Parents or school personnel may make referrals
- **Evaluation-** If the committee believes that the child would probably be eligible for

²The CDC defines mental health to include “our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices.1 Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, poor mental health and mental illness are not the same things. A person can experience poor mental health and not be diagnosed with a mental illness. Likewise, a person diagnosed with a mental illness can experience periods of physical, mental, and social well-being.” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

Section 504 services, an evaluation in the suspected area must be completed. This evaluation must use nondiscriminatory procedures.

- **Eligibility Determination-** After the evaluation, the committee must determine if the student has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity.
- **Accommodation Plan Development-** If the committee determines that the student is eligible under Section 504, an accommodation plan must be developed.
- **Periodic Reevaluation-** The school must periodically reevaluate the student to determine continuing eligibility under section 504.

Commonsense Guidelines for Section 504

- Appoint a district Section 504 coordinator who can devote substantial amounts of time to the law and to coordinating the district's efforts.
- Appoint building-level 504 coordinators.
- Develop a policy and procedures manual for Section 504 that includes a grievance procedure.
- Develop a set of 504 forms.
- Treat people fairly.
- Use common sense.
- Treat people in the same way you would want your own child or yourself treated.

Accommodations outlined in a 504 Plan must also be reasonable. Reasonable accommodations are adjustments to the tasks, environment or to the way things are usually done that enable individuals with disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in an academic program or a job (Leidinger, 2004). Programs that effectively implement such accommodations find that their student outcomes have become strengthened (Cole, 1995).

Disability is often viewed from a medical model, which frames disability as an abnormality that needs to be fixed (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). In education, this manifests in labeling the student as a problem, and the disability as something to be remediated. This results in students with disabilities being excluded from many aspects of education (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). Another typical framework that disability is viewed from is the social model. The social model, in contrast, relays that disability does affect an individual but it is also a “reflection of

how society regards and facilitates or impedes interactions among people with all kinds of bodies, minds, and affects” (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017). In education, that means that the attention is focused on how schools and curriculum can be designed to enable everyone to access learning. Section 504 Plans plays a role in how schools adapt for students with disabilities, and how they make sure that students are included (or excluded).

In summary, 504 Plans are a part of Section 504 and therefore the law. The process to create 504 Plans can change from school to school, but there are some requirements such as nondiscriminatory evaluation. These plans are created so that students have the opportunity to access the same information and possibilities as their peers. There are many models of disability, including the medical and social models, which are prevalent in our school system.

Context

Here I will review relevant literature and discuss gaps in the literature. Current research encompasses many related topics including successful 504 Plans, teacher understanding of 504 Plans, administrators experiences with 504, and mental health in schools. However, there is a lack of research on training on 504 Plans, educators' attitudes towards and perception of 504 Plans, building practices that support 504 Plans, and the way educators view mental health. Much of the existing research is also quantitative, and therefore does not reach educator perspectives and/or the reasoning behind the findings.

One qualitative dissertation researched the common elements of successful 504 Plans through classroom observations and educator interviews. In this research Webb-Damron (2005) used parent, teacher, and administrators perspectives to create this definition of success: student making academic progress and learning the skills to prepare them for future coursework. Webb Damron found that "there were several factors that were significant to the success of each plan: (a) Candid and frequent communication between parents, teachers, and administration, (b) Accommodations and modifications necessary for academic achievement, (c) Students' willingness to work and perform, and (d) Active and frequent parental involvement in child's academic work and with school experiences" (Webb-Damron, 2005).

Another study, published in 2008 by Walkins, studied teachers' knowledge of Section 504 and 504 Plans in rural Georgia. The studied school district has annual in-services on 504 updates and has a 504-compliance officer. Still, when asked about 504 Plans, teachers responded that they did not know what those were, didn't use them, or didn't like them. A formal survey completed by 12 teachers asked questions about 504 Plans, such as "do 504 Plans require parental permission for eligibility and placement decisions?" (100% of the teachers answered

this question incorrectly). The findings showed that 10 out of 12 participants understand that 504 Plans are legal documents that they must closely adhere to. However, 10 teachers also did not have a basic understanding of 504 Plans, answering 50% or more of the questions incorrectly. In other words, this study indicates that general education teachers do not have adequate knowledge of 504. However, this study had a small sample size and few survey questions, meaning the results may not be generalizable.

Administrators have also been surveyed, but on their experiences with Section 504 as a whole rather than 504 Plans. For example, from 37 surveys using Likert scales, Williams (2003) found that the majority of administrators had positive experiences with the implementation of Section 504, and felt that it enhanced the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. However, only 36% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “lack of funding to implement Section 504 makes it difficult to comply with” (Williams, 2003). Some (31%) also agreed or strongly agreed that 504 is a burdensome government mandate that has little benefit to students with disabilities. Additionally, while the majority agreed that teachers are open to changing their teaching to accommodate students, they also believed that teachers do not have the knowledge and ability to successfully create and implement Section 504. Generally though, it is not a teacher’s job to create 504 Plans- most schools have a coordinator or psychologist to create plans- which may have affected the results of that question; many teachers may have the knowledge to fulfill but not to create a 504 Plan. Finally, survey respondents were asked what changes to Section 504 would be beneficial to administrators? Their responses, chosen from a set of options, included: provide funding (50%), provide education (17%), provide uniform, simple form (25%), and eliminate Section 504 (8%) (Williams, 2003).

There have been other studies that sought to understand teachers' perceptions of their role in students' mental health, and their knowledge of and attitudes toward evidence-based practices. This is important because medical and mental health conditions are the two categories covered by 504 Plans (Sharbek, 2017), and "the vast majority of individuals who receive any mental health services receive them in school" (Reinke, 2011). The majority of teachers in Reinke's study (2011) agreed that schools should address students' mental health issues. Few teachers though, reported having the knowledge, skills, or experience to do so. These teachers believe the top reasons "children needing mental health support fall through the cracks" are lack of: parent support programs, prevention programs, and staff training (Reinke, 2011). Similarly, the top barriers reported were: insufficient in-school mental health professionals, lack of training, and lack of funding. "While educators and policymakers recognize that good mental health is essential to achieving success in life, schools are not primarily organized to facilitate the provision of mental health services" (Reinke, 2011). Yet through plans such as 504, many schools and educators are expected to.

This is particularly significant now, because since 2008 there has been a rise in the implementation of 504 Plans (Sharbek, 2017). There are a variety of reasons that may have caused this surge such as: No Child Left Behind, Other Health Impairment classification, litigation, and an increase in awareness and action around mental health.

Overall, the current literature addresses many topics in relation to 504 Plans. Webb-Damron studied the ways people define successful 504 Plans and what leads to that success. Walkins found that teachers do not have enough information about 504 Plans. Administrators in Williams' study had positive experiences with Section 504, but still encountered obstacles such as funding. In Reinke's work, educators knew the importance of

mental health but did not feel equipped to provide it in schools. Still, there are many unanswered questions, some of which I pose in the next section.

Research Questions

There are four research questions I hope to answer through this study:

1. What knowledge (training) do school personnel have of 504 Plans?
2. What are school personnel perspectives on the feasibility of 504 Plan accommodations?
3. How do school personnel define mental health?
4. How do school personnel view the student role in 504 Plans?

The purpose of these questions is to understand what may be preventing school personnel from carrying out 504 Plans, and what may be leading to efficacy. From that information I hope to develop recommendations as to how 504 Plans can be improved. I hypothesize that the main supports and barriers educators experience are attitudes, administrative/ district support, and knowledge (or training). This hypothesis stemmed from the research and informal reporting mentioned in previous sections.

Research Methods: Type of Approach

This research will be done through basic combined quantitative and qualitative research, specifically an emailed survey and a case study conducted through open-ended Zoom interviews. The quantitative portion, or the survey, begins with objective questions that provide details such as how many educators have fulfilled 504 Plans. It also allows for the study to be more generalizable, as the survey had more respondents than the interviews. The survey reached a broader range of respondents, to create an initial understanding of school personnels' knowledge and attitudes. As the surveys are anonymous, participants may also have been more honest.

Qualitative research is well suited for the second portion of this study because it “assumes that there are multiple realities” such as the separate perspectives of teachers, students, and administrators. The information and world I seek to understand “is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring” Merriam (1998). Also, speaking about 504 Plans can be a sensitive topic- admitting failure to follow one can open a school to litigation; the process will need to have a personal approach where information can have context. Therefore, I will focus on a small group, and work to extrapolate thick descriptions from that group (also known as a case study). As Yin is quoted by Merriam in 2009 “case study methodology is especially appropriate when prior theoretical propositions guide data collection and analysis and the researcher wishes to account for and describe contextual conditions”. In other words, this research will allow us to “enter into the other’s perspective” (Merriam, 1998), with deep contextual knowledge and guidance from previous research.

Research Methods: Setting and Participants

While it would be preferable to speak with school personnel, students, and parents, schools will not release student and parent information, or confidential 504 Plans. Additionally, it is difficult to get IRB approval for topics related to youth mental health. For those reasons, I began with school personnels' experiences with 504 Plans. This information helps to identify the supports and barriers educators face in plan implementation. Specifically, I surveyed and interviewed general education school personnel from a secondary school district in Illinois. A public school district was chosen because many private schools do not utilize 504 Plans (it is only required for schools that receive federal funding). The two secondary schools, River and Grand High School, were chosen because there are more 504 Plans in secondary schools than elementary schools (Holler & Zirkel, 2008). I surveyed 15 people, and interviewed 4.

The specific school district was chosen with purposeful, networking, and convenience sampling. Purposeful sampling "leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (Glesne, 2016), because there is a basis for the questions and research. Network and convenience sampling is based on who I and other participants know (Glesne, 2016). A student and their parents from River High have expressed the staff's reluctance to implement or fulfil 504 Plans, and so I wanted to know more. The principal from Grand and River High readily agreed for me to conduct teacher surveys and interviews, but only teachers from River High responded to requests for interviews. All teachers were invited to participate in the survey. Only teachers who have previously fulfilled 504 Plan accommodations were invited to participate in interviews because interview questions inquire about specific experiences implementing 504 Plans. Further explanation of why will be provided in the data collection section.

Research Methods: Data Collection

Data was first collected through a survey through Google Forms. This was sent to all school staff to fill out, to create an initial understanding of their experiences. The survey has questions that any educator should be able to answer, regardless of experience with 504 Plans (see survey questions in Appendix A). A follow-up email was sent to invite anyone who has implemented 504 Plans to partake in an interview. Using both surveys and interviews is instrumental to understanding teacher conception and perceived obstacles of 504 Plan implementation, while increasing triangulation.

The interviews took place virtually over Zoom, in part due to COVID-19, and in part due to findings that “people are more inclined to remember and tell life stories when the surroundings are conducive to thinking about these experiences” (Salis Reyes, 2019). Zoom provides an opportunity for participants to choose where the interview is conducted, hopefully in a space that is conducive for them. There was one semi-structured interview per participant, and each was about 45 minutes long. Only one interview was conducted per participant to be respectful of educators’ time³. The interviews were in-depth but also left room for other questions, or as Glesne describes it, an “opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see... in the process of listening to respondents, you learn what questions to ask” (Glesne, 2016). During the interview notes were also taken to capture key ideas and participants’ reactions. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix C.

³ Particularly during COVID-19 teaching has been difficult and time-consuming, and so scheduling even single interviews has been difficult.

All interviews were audio recorded to be referred to later. Then, I listened to the recording and used speech-to-text to transcribe the interviews. This allowed me to use the transcriptions to code the data, as described in the next section.

Research Methods: Data Analysis

For my data analysis, I used an inductive method where I open-coded the surveys and interviews line by line (Glesne, 2016). From those codes, I created themes in which I linked thoughts and identified patterns. Patterns I identified and coded for included school personnel training, mental health, building policies, feasibility, and student role. Training I defined as instruction provided by a qualified person (such as the 504 Coordinator) on how to implement 504 Plans. For mental health, I used the CDC's definition to classify almost anything related to emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Building policies including anything the participants identified as happening building wide, and not specific to their classroom. Feasibility included educators' reports on supports and barriers, as well as their confidence in ability to fulfill accommodations. Finally, the student role is anything the student had to do/ the initiative they took in their 504 Plan. All based on educators' perspectives.

By finding patterns, I began to understand the school environment, and the beliefs the staff often hold. In Glesne's work she references Wolcott who refers to this method as analysis, a way to identify "key factors in the study and the relationships among them" (Glesne, 2016). I also used Wolcott's third means of data transformation: interpretation. Wolcott describes this as the act of leaving cautious analysis and attempting to understand what is to be made of it. There are several of his strategies I used such as "using theory to provide structure, connecting with personal experience, and exploring alternative means of presenting data" (Glesne, 2016). The purpose of this is to make my work accessible and promising for future researchers.

Survey Findings

Fifteen educators completed the survey including general and special education teachers, counselors, deans, assistant principals, counselors, and a school nurse. The survey questions and structure can be found in Appendix A and the quantitative answers are in Appendix B. The open-ended-questions though, provided much more data to interpret. Here, I will describe five main topics addressed through the surveys: 504 training, definition of accommodation, mental health training, feasibility, supports and barriers.

504 Training

In the open-ended questions participants reported high levels of knowledge, experience, and confidence in regards to 504 Plans. This is intriguing because the majority also reported receiving no training. When asked if they had training on how to provide accommodations, two survey respondents stated that 504 Plans were mentioned in their graduate program, and another in their undergraduate program- “we talked about them existing” (Respondent 1), but they did not consider that training. Only four educators answered with a definitive yes; some had attended professional development training led by their 504 Plan Coordinator. One of those four included that it “was not super useful however. They tried to teach us the difference between an accommodation/modification” (Respondent 11). Based on this information, training is not often provided and that when it is provided, the usefulness is not always made clear to teachers.

Definition of Accommodation

There is a significant distinction between accommodations and modifications (Baglieri and Shapiro, 2017), so it is also important to understand what accommodation means to educators. Five different respondents described accommodation as support given to students, either for access to the curriculum or for success in school. Some included qualifiers, for

example that supports are for students with disabilities, disadvantages, or “for a person with a 504 Plan” (Respondent 14). Eight surveyees labeled accommodation as an adaptation, using synonyms such as revised work, adjustments, changes, and alterations, or “differentiated instruction/ strategies” (Respondent 10). In other words, “changing the way a student learns something but not necessarily changing what they are expected to learn” (Respondent 11). These eight respondents appear to understand the distinction between accommodations and modifications, and to maintain high expectations of all students. Three of those eight think of adaptations as a route to success, another thinks of it as a route to mastery, and another so that accommodated students can “learn just like all other students” (Respondent 3). Lastly, one person labeled accommodations as setting parameters, so a student can “ obtain education and achieve learning given medical (which could include mental, social/emotional, physical or environmental) challenges” (Respondent 5).

Mental Health Training

In contrast to the reported 504 training, nine people responded that they had received training on how to support students’ mental health. This is not including Respondent 15, who elaborated, unlike the other participants:

“yes and no. We've had numerous staff meetings and institute days on restorative justice. I don't feel this has addressed specific mental health, more like behavior. We've not had specific examples on how to help students. I am able to contact the school social worker on students I feel are in "crisis" or need additional support” (Respondent 15).

This implies that the participant defines mental health in terms of crisis, additional support needs, but not behavior or restorative justice. They also feel confident in their ability to identify a student in crisis and know who to ask for help.

There are various ways that educators identify that they use the mental health training they have received, including general check-ins with students, recognizing “trigger points” (Respondent 8), and teaching students how to self-regulate and de-escalate. One respondent felt it was particularly useful when teaching students that have dealt with trauma. “Mostly, the training helps remind you that your students may be going through some serious issues that require you to see things from their perspective,” stated Respondent 4. This demonstrates that in training, Respondent 4 learned to define mental health by serious issues and to see things from the students’ perspective.

Feasibility

When provided with a hypothetical student, Sam, and her 504 Plan, there were varying perspectives on the feasibility or reasonableness, and confidence educators had in fulfilling the 504 Plan. All were able to identify additional supports they might recommend for Sam, the hypothetical student, listed in the table below.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prompts to complete homework ● Audio recording of lecture to listen to later ● Fidget spinner ● Stretch breaks ● Allowed to stand and/or go get water ● Small group setting for assessments ● Extended time on tests ● Videotaping presentations or giving them only to the teacher ● Regular check-ins with the teacher ● Working with a small group based on social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to the school nurse or counselor for breaks or emotional support ● Preferential seating ● Working with him to come to other means of diffusing a situation ● Separate testing space ● Providing or allowing the use of calming down or self-soothing tools such as time for drawing or coloring ● Break area in the classroom ● Creating a nonverbal signal between teacher and student for a break, help, or wanting to answer questions
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One respondent added, “I think some accommodations depend on the age and grade level of the student. Depending on what is being asked of the student, 2nd grade looks very different than

upper elementary and beyond” (Respondent 14). The survey did not include the grade level of the student, doing so may have changed the participants’ answers.

86.7% of the participants (13) believe that Sam could be successful in a general education classroom. Respondent 9 believed Sam could not be successful in a general education classroom. While Respondent 9 did not directly explain why, in a later question they wrote, “when I see a student who needs a lot of support outside of the curriculum, then I rely on the paraprofessional in the classroom to assist me. The accommodation to draw for the first ten minutes seems unrealistic to me.” Similarly, Respondent 15 marked “other” and elaborated that it would depend on the availability of a classroom aide. To see a more detailed perspective, teachers also rated how reasonable they felt the accommodation was, and how confident they were that they could implement it if Sam were their student. Graphed data can be found in Appendix B, as measured by Likert scales. On average though, the majority of respondents felt that the first four accommodations were reasonable, and confident they could implement them in their own classroom. However, for the last accommodation- the first ten minutes of class can be spent exercising in the back of the classroom- respondents were less confident and felt that this was a less reasonable accommodation.

Supports and Barriers

The final questions “what supports do you currently have to provide accommodations?” and “what barriers do you anticipate if you were expected to implement Sam’s 504 Plan?” provided more insight to the participants’ answers. Identified supports included pre-designed spaces and co-workers. Spaces included testing centers, supported study hall and safe spaces within the school. Specific staff mentioned were administration, paraeducators, 504 Coordinator, counselors, psychologists, and colleagues. Support from co-workers came in the form of yearly

reviews, giving clear directions, sharing tools, follow-up emails after 504 meetings, and having open communication. In particular, four respondents mentioned receiving support from special education teachers.

On the other hand, there were two categories of barriers I coded from the respondents' answers: logistics and concerns for the student. Many of the surveyees felt they did not have the time, classroom space, or staff to fulfill the accommodations- particularly the movement break. Concerns that the accommodations could actually hurt Sam were also prevalent; some educators were concerned that Sam would be missing class and therefore important content. Similarly, a language teacher expressed that the test being read to Sam may not be the best practice, when reading and writing are important parts of learning a new language. Another concern was that the accommodations may single Sam out. Two respondents said there would not be any barriers.

Summary

Through the surveys the 15 participants gave greater insight to many aspects of 504 Plan implementation. The majority reported no training on 504 Plans, but experience implementing them. On the other hand, the majority did have mental health training. There were varying definitions of accommodation, but everyone was able to suggest more accommodations that may be appropriate for Sam. Additionally, almost everyone believed Sam could be successful in general education, even if they were not confident or found the required accommodations unreasonable for their classroom. Supports and barriers provided some explanation such as co-worker support and a lack of classroom aides. Interpretations of this information will be discussed in the next section.

Survey Discussion

Oftentimes, quantitative data does not leave much for interpretation. However, there are aspects of the survey findings that should be analyzed. To begin, the data suggests a need for more and/or better training in regards to 504 Plans. According to one of our interviewees (Ana), all general education teachers will encounter a student with a 504 Plan at some point in their career, and typically have at least one per year. Only four out of 15 respondents though, received training and those four may be administrators or the 504 Coordinator- they may not all be teachers. Also, while it is great that at least one person had 504 training in their graduate education, not all teachers pursue graduate education. All school personnel need training - beyond acknowledging the existence of 504 Plans- to be properly prepared to support students.

To be properly prepared, school personnel should know who to go to for help, what accommodations are and who they are for. More than one participant said that they go to the special education teacher for support. This is interesting, considering special education teachers do not typically have students with 504 Plans- they are meant for the general education classroom. At one school, the 504 Coordinator was previously a special education teacher, which may explain some confusion. However, special education teachers should not be the main providers of training and support, unless designated (meaning they have proper pay and training).

Some participants also did not seem to understand that anyone can receive an accommodation- they labeled them being for people with disabilities, or even restricted to people with 504 Plans. It is also important to be able to distinguish accommodations and modifications, despite one participant claiming that was not useful. An accommodation changes how a student learns through proper support. A modification changes what the student is expected to learn-

often meaning the standards are lowered and/or the student becomes segregated within the school (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017).

Nine out of 15 respondents had had mental health training. They used defined mental health in terms such as de-escalate, trauma, and serious issues. De-escalation is a vital and important tool to have, but it is also a reactive tool. Trauma and serious issues are significant and can imply very complex mental health needs. If mental health is only defined by aspects such as trauma, we miss the everyday intricacies that also play a role. If we include everyday aspects in mental health it is also more likely to be preventative of more serious issues. To clarify, school personnel need to understand all levels of mental health, and that may simply mean expanding their definition of what mental health includes.

The survey also left me with multiple questions. Overall, the respondents had positive attitudes towards supporting Sam; 86.7% said that she could be successful in a general education classroom. Yet, some of those who said yes also marked 1s (not at all confident) on their ability to implement the required accommodations in their classroom. Respondent 9, who said Sam could not be successful in a general education classroom, marked almost all fives (very confident and reasonable) for every accommodation.

While the supports and barriers question provided some explanation for the inconsistencies, it leaves more to be understood. What does that say about teacher's ownership over the success of students in general education? How do we support the other 13.3% to believe that is possible? Contrarily, two respondents claimed that there would be no barriers to supporting Sam- is that realistic given our current education system? There were also varying definitions and insights on mental health, how do we come to a clearer definition? In other words, the survey answers provide an initial understanding of school personnel perspectives and

answers to my research questions. However, the survey responses leave a lot up to interpretation, and more unanswered questions. The interviews will provide an opportunity to expand on that knowledge and hopefully answer more questions.

Interview Profiles

The following profiles are of three interviews I conducted with school personnel from River High School in Illinois. These interviews provide the “why” behind the results of the surveys. For example, why teachers may not be receiving training or why they are confident in their ability to fulfill accommodations. While there were open-ended questions in the surveys, the interviews provided an opportunity to ask follow-up and more detailed questions.

The interviewees were all experienced educators who have fulfilled 504 Plans in their classrooms (or previous classrooms). Each is presented as a case so that their experiences, practices, attitudes, and knowledge- which is what I aimed to learn from these interviews- can be seen in alignment. The information from each case will come together for comparison in a cross case analysis, following the profiles.

Derek⁴

Seventeen years ago Derek began teaching because “it’s a family business.” Before Derek his father, grandfather, and many other family members were teachers. Derek teaches government and history courses because those are topics he is passionate about and can inspire students to be as well.

With seventeen years of experience, Derek has become accustomed to 504 Plans. In fact, he described them as “predictable” and has developed unique systems to ensure successful implementation. For example, he and another teacher created a spreadsheet of accommodations that their students need to be successful (see Appendix D). At the beginning of each school year, they update the list. Oftentimes, there are students on the list who do not have a formal plan but need accommodation, so they are included. The spreadsheet, according to Derek, was made in an

⁴ All names are pseudonyms.

effort to reduce the amount of paperwork that goes into a plan, and the work required of the 504 Coordinator. In the future, Derek said he hopes that 504 Plans will be simpler, "the 504 Coordinator has a lot on her plate. It's a lot of paperwork and I think it could be more concise."

Derek also felt that it is important to reach out to the family first "I like to call home before the parents reach out to me, to see if there's anything I can do that's not in the plan. They have always said no, and I encourage them to call if they think of anything, but none of them have ever taken me up on that. This shows parents that you're human and you're on their side." This preemptive work allows Derek to have a more positive relationship with the family and student, he said.

Derek has encountered some recurring obstacles including that some students will not use their accommodations. In multiple questions, he spoke about how students "don't know when someone has a 504 Plan, but they think others know." This leads to them feeling too self-conscious to accept or utilize accommodations, out of "fear of appearing dumb in front of their classmates." To counteract that, whenever Derek has students who do not use their accommodations, he said he checks in with them one-on-one and assures them there will be no judgement from him if they use their accommodations. If the fear persists, he offers to send tools such as graphic organizers through Google Classroom, so that others do not have to know about it.

For some students, that resolves the barrier. For other students, Derek develops individual systems with them in addition to their plan. For example, one student agreed to raise her right hand when she knew the answer to a question and wanted to be called on, and to raise her left hand if she did not want to be called on, to decrease the perceived risk. Another student outright refused to use accommodations because "she said she did not want to make me do extra work." It

took time and a lot of reassurance to convince the student she was not a burden, and to use the provided accommodations. In some cases, Derek also reminds students that “many people worked very hard to create the plans to assist the student, and if we don’t use the accommodations we are wasting the team’s time and effort.” From Derek’s examples, we learn that when he provides extra individualized support, students are more likely to use provided accommodations.

Derek was the only interviewee to express hesitancy in supporting students’ mental health. When asked if teachers should play a role in supporting student’s mental health, he replied “I am willing to admit there’s a lot I don’t know about mental health. If it came from student services/ guidance, that would be great. But I don’t have background knowledge to support students.” Here Derek expresses that he has not had appropriate training regarding mental health and how to support students. Even with training, there is indication that Derek believes that mental health should still be the responsibility of student services.

Derek’s case gives insight into teachers and 504 Coordinator’s workloads. It also shows the importance of meeting students where they are at with individualized solutions. Lastly, Derek provides perspective on mental health training for educators.

Candice

Candice has worked as a special education teacher for six years. Before then, she spent six years as a paraeducator, and two as a general education teacher (K-8). Unlike the rest of the interviewees, Candice went into education because she did not have a great educational experience. Teachers did not recognize that Candice was struggling with reading, and they were not able to help her. Candice felt that for those reasons she did not know how to learn, study, or prepare for school until her junior or senior year of high school. “I didn’t want any other student to have to ever go through that and have that much schooling before they figured out who they

were as a learner,” which is why she went into education. With her experience, Candice said she feels more aware of and able to support students who are struggling.

There are a few ways Candice identified that students and staff could be better supported, and almost all of them lead back to hiring a second 504 Coordinator. The current 504 Coordinator has two different high schools that she tends to, around 200 504 Plans, and has some responsibility to train teachers. Candice did say that if she needed anything in regards to 504 Plans the coordinator would be available, “she’d be there for sure.” However, she later said, “I don't think [the 504 Coordinator] gets to build the rapport or the relationships with the students because she’s stretched so thin. I'd like to see more developed relationships.”

Teachers, Candice said, often have the relationships but not the training to modify or create accommodations. Candice, like many participants, said that she had never had training specifically on 504 Plans, but says they were *probably* talked about in her masters program. “Here’s the thing,” Candice added, “I still have general education teachers here that ask “what’s the difference between an IEP and a 504?” they don’t know.” In other words, teachers do not have the knowledge to distinguish common plans that they will most likely encounter at some point in their career. The knowledge Candice does have mainly comes from experience and listening to students.

In recent experience, Candice has worked with two students with 504 Plans for diabetes. Candice felt that “their self-advocacy skills by the time they get to high school are a lot louder than at the elementary level.” In Candice’s class, the students’ 504 Plans allowed them to eat in class and go to the nurse to get their levels checked as necessary. The students had to and did manage their accommodations on their own; a teacher cannot tell you when your blood sugar feels low.

Candice also spoke about taking time to get to know who her students are and how to support their mental health, “I get to know the students as to who they are outside of school. What are their likes/dislikes? What kind of music do they listen to? What is their favorite food? What is their favorite movie? Most importantly, I greet them at the door. I stand outside of the classroom and greet each student, every hour, every day.” By doing so, Candice develops positive relationships with her students that better allow her to engage them, particularly when they are struggling. Additionally, on a daily basis she asks them to answer a Peardeck question. Peardeck is a slideshow that all students can contribute to simultaneously- Candice can see who wrote what answer, but the students see anonymous answers. Then, Candice said she can see which students need to talk further and they can do so to the side, rather than in front of everyone.

Candice brought unique input on the 504 Coordinator’s relationship with students, as well as insight to her colleagues responsibilities and knowledge (or lack thereof). She also described getting to know her students personally and supporting their mental health.

Ana

The last interviewee, Ana, has been an assistant principal since 2015. Before then, she was a general education, and at times co-teacher, of history courses for many years “let’s just say I started a *long* long time ago.” Originally though, Ana studied history because she wanted to become a lawyer. After college, she began coaching high school volleyball and basketball and saw that teaching was something she could do while coaching. Additionally, she had a great educational experience and wanted to pass that on to other students. As an assistant principal, central to Ana’s understanding is the importance of student independence and that was reflected throughout the interview.

Ana defined increased student independence as the key indicator of a successful 504 Plan. How that is measured varies from student to student, but some examples Ana used include increased attendance and participation in class. Unfortunately, Ana reported that many of the 504 Plans they inherit from middle schools do not promote independence, and at the high school level they inherit more plans than they create. Ana recounted a time when they had a freshman who in middle school had been “allowed, if she got upset at school, to just not go to class and to stay in the main office. Like, what are you doing? That doesn’t support independence.” According to Ana, when the high school team creates a plan, they make sure there are strong parameters that help students develop life skills and give teachers more guidance to support students.

Once students have the support though, Ana said students also need to take initiative. It’s like “when you go to the grocery store and, you know sometimes they ask ‘paper or plastic?’ and sometimes they double up the plastic or paper. They could do that on every bag, but they do it when it’s necessary.” A customer may not get something double bagged every time, because maybe they didn’t buy any canned goods this time or maybe they brought a tote bag- it’s about individual needs on an individual day. However, none of that matters if the customer leaves the groceries at the store. “It doesn’t need to be triple bagged. It’s just that I left it there when it happened, I didn’t do it.” In other words, the school can provide plans and accommodations, but the student still has to do the work.

Ana felt that many families do not understand the purposes of a 504 Plan, or that the student has to put in the work. Many think of it as a “fix” according to Ana; they believe that “accommodations across the board means a student is going to be successful, and that’s not true.” Again, the student has to do the work. Additionally, some families have “abused” 504

Plans. For example, they have tried to get their student a 504 Plan so that they could have more time on the SAT, which Ana says “just takes up everyone’s time.” Similarly, there are parents who treat school like a mental health facility when it is not. This results in schools having to make up for the stigma and the inaccessibility of mental health facilities, when they do not have the capacity to do so, said Ana

When I asked Ana about how her knowledge of 504 Plans has evolved, the following was her response.

"An embarrassing amount. It's shocking what I didn't know. And I think that's changing a little bit as just our kids come with more stuff and they share more stuff with teachers but it's- I always understood special education- I was always a co- teacher, but when you're a co-teacher you still only get a small percentage of the special education population. So I think that my knowledge expanded exponentially by this year. One, who qualifies for a 504 and what happens after high school. Just the variety of kids that have a 504 before and what they need a 504 plan for."

With many years of experience, and an administrative role, Ana is still learning.

With that experience and knowledge Ana has developed hopes for the future of 504 Plans.

“I think in my dream world I would love for them not to be necessary. I think that everybody should get what they need to be successful. If you don't have a pencil I'm going to give you a pencil and that's not going to be why you can't prove your content mastery. I think that should be true for every kid. I think we think that 504 plans are only for students who struggle to do well in school. That's not the case. I think that if we really took a look at what we call our high-flying students, or students who do really well in school, their mental health could improve with support as well. So I wish we didn't even have them, that they weren't necessary, but I get that they are so I just wish we had more people that were responsible for ensuring that each student has what they need.”

In a classroom, Ana thinks this would mean all students have more options for showing their knowledge, and less rote memorization. In other words, Ana hopes for large system changes.

Ana’s interview shows how much she has learned about and from 504 Plans. Important to her is the role of student independence and initiative. This is in part because Ana wants to be

able to support students and their mental health, but does not believe schools are equipped to do so. In an ideal world, Ana thinks that 504 Plans would not be necessary, because teachers would already be creating individualization and accommodations to make sure all students are successful.

Cross Case Analysis

Each of the interviewees went into education to pass along skills to their students. Derek, and Ana said that they all had a great educational experience and wanted their students to have the same. Candice was the only outlier, in that she did not have a great experience, but still wanted to turn that into something positive for her students. This is the first of many commonalities I identified throughout the interviews. Despite being from one high school in Illinois, I also found differences in their experiences. Both will be addressed in this cross case analysis.

Knowledge and training was fairly consistent throughout the interviewees- they had not received training on 504 Plans, yet they had a lot of knowledge about them. Ana went so far as to say that what she did not know was shocking and embarrassing. All reported gaining information through experience. Derek illustrates this when he talks about methods he has implemented over time, such as the accommodation chart he and another teacher created. Candice pointed out that this experience also extends to other teachers, who do not know the difference between 504 Plans and IEPs.

Similarly, Derek and Candice all knew who to go to for assistance with 504 Plans or to support a student's mental health, but support is not provided before they ask for it. Derek and Candice will speak up as needed, but they also recognize the reality that there is one 504 Coordinator with 200 different plans to organize. Part of why Derek utilizes the chart is because he wants to avoid giving the coordinator more work when possible. Ana also reflects that when she says that schools, as they are currently staffed, do not have the capacity to provide certain support.

Another intersection everyone came to was the role they believe students play in the success of their 504 Plans. Candice spoke about students, especially at the high school level, having to take care of themselves because they know what they need better than the teacher will. Derek and Ana both talked about how students have to actually use the accommodations. There is a willingness and desire to provide students with support to do so- Derek said he works with students 1:1 to get them what they need to feel comfortable using accommodations. However, they still believe that has limits, and students have to have some initiative.

One discrepancy I found amongst the interviewees was the way they define mental health. For example, Derek considers mental health supports to be outside of his practice. According to the CDC's definition "mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices". Meaning, Derek providing individualized support so that students can use their accommodations would be mental health support. Candice recognized that mental health relates to everything we do, and spoke about how it is a daily practice in their classroom (such as when Candice uses Peardeck to check-in with her students). Ana also believes that everyone needs accommodations and mental health support, but unlike Candice, she does not believe schools have the capacity to do so.

Given that this information was fairly consistent through both the surveys and interviews, it is possible that it is consistent with other populations. For that reason, the interviews will be further discussed with interpretations and recommendations in the next sections.

Interview Discussion

Overall, what I gathered from these interviews is that school personnel (or at least three school personnel from River High) want to support their students, but may not have the training or support to do so. Schools need strong support in the form of more staff, ending stigma, training on universal design for learning and mental health, and maybe even retiring 504 Plans.

Support needs to come in many different forms, from both inside and outside of schools. For example, mental health facilities need to be accessible, without stigma, to everyone. Resolving that stigma is a societal problem, and schools are a large part of our society- hence it needs to come from both inside and out. This will, in part, require a clearer and more uniform definition of what mental health is. Derek has many mental health practices integrated in his teaching, but does not recognize it as such. We need adults who are knowledgeable and bring in these practices with both heart and intentionality.

Another form of stigma that needs to be addressed, is the feelings of self-consciousness students experience. Feeling self-conscious is considered typical of high school students; being so is seen as a product of being a teenager and growing up. However, something I tried to probe Derek on is where that fear stems from in regards to utilizing accommodations. During the interview we did not reach a conclusion, but I believe it comes from the ableist culture that is present in our education system and society. The student Derek described who felt she was a burden, demonstrates the prevalent medical model- that disability is only as tolerable as it is ignorable or fixable. In schools, students in special education are usually isolated in separate sections of the school. How are students supposed to know how to be comfortable with their and others disabilities, when the adults show it is something to be kept hidden? At one point, Derek said “in the real world everyone has accommodations, they’re just not written out so we forget.”

There was one main theme that came from these interviews that I did not see much of in other research and that is that the need for support is universal, so we should make support universal. Instead of developing ways for students to keep their accommodations hidden, why not attempt to normalize accommodations? How do you reduce the stigma of something no one will talk about? Well, asking a teenager to openly use their accommodations is unlikely to be successful given the stigma. One solution could be to start with both younger and older people; normalize accommodations and disability when students are even younger. Have teachers be open and apparent with the accommodations they have and use. From the very beginning, show how everyone uses accommodations.

Additionally, there needs to be a more uniform and clear definition of mental health that all school personnel understand. As with accommodations, everyone experiences mental health. It affects everything we do. There should not be only some school personnel who recognize this and integrate it into their practices, it should be expected that everyone does and intentionally uses it.

Normalization may also entail completely retiring 504 Plans. 504 Plans can have limitations as discussed in the interviews, such as risk of overqualification and accommodations that may not actually meet the student's needs. If everyone receives accommodations or individualization- as we have established everyone needs something- there is no risk of overqualification and we are not limited by what is on paper. It is possible that teachers may be able to go further without 504 Plans. However, retiring 504 Plans would require a lot of changes to our current systems. Schools need to have better training, more staff, more funding, and maybe even a better interviewing procedure (there should be no such thing as a teacher who refuses to

differentiate instruction). All of this would require large societal changes, but it would be worth it.

Personally, I am excited to take the knowledge I have gained from this work into my professional practice. Throughout my career I hope to help increase normalization of accommodations and individualization. There are many ways I will do so, such as being open about my own accommodations. If it is not already available, I will also encourage my employers to have training on 504 Plans and mental health that show educators how to integrate those into everyday practices/ curriculum. I will continue to push for inclusivity/ desegregation of our schools with a focus on special education.

Future Research

Overall, while I found patterns in this research, I will not claim my work to be generalizable; this work lends itself to a lot of future research. Future research could focus on the perspectives of parents and students. Each interviewee had a perspective on the student role in the success of 504 Plans. However, with student input more definitive claims may be made about student agency.

This research also reached a limited number of participants from only one school. It would be beneficial to reach a broader range of participants, from grades K-8, other states, and/or teachers with less experience.

There is also more research needed on the mental health aspect of 504 Plans- there are not available statistics on how many 504 Plans are used for mental health reasons and if they are effective for that purpose. With increasing understanding and acknowledgement of mental health, this may be increasingly important.

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Appendix A
Survey Questions

Have you ever implemented or carried out a 504 Plan?

Yes

No

What does accommodation mean to you?

At your school, who is in charge of creating 504 Plans?

Are you aware of how to provide 504 accommodations?

Yes

No

It depends on the accommodation

Do you know when to recommend a student for a 504 Plan?

Yes

No

Have you ever received training on 504 accommodations? If yes, what did you learn and when/how have you been able to use that knowledge?

Have you ever received training on how to support students' mental health? If yes, what did you learn and when/how have you been able to use that knowledge?

Please review the following 504 Plan and answer the following questions.

Date To Be Reviewed: 10/15/2021

Date To Be Written: 10/16/2020

Student: Sam Brown

District/Building: Grade:

DOB:

Parent (Guardian) Name: Maria and Nicolas Brown Plan Facilitator: Mindi Abair, School Psychologist

Date of Eligibility Determination: 8/12/2020

Parent (Guardian)

Classroom Teacher

Expert Reviewer in Area of Disability

Administrator/Designee

Member/Position

Member/Position

Areas of Strength: Sam is intelligent and demonstrates this well through quiet, written work. Sam cares about school; at home he studies most of the afternoon. Sam's favorite subjects are art and gym. When spoken to 1:1 Sam will speak at length about his favorite topics: drawing, soccer, and video games. Parents and teachers describe Sam as energetic, funny, and creative.			
Describe Areas of Concern Based on Eligibility Determination: This year Sam was diagnosed with anxiety disorder. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not answering test questions due being unable to concentrate on the paper • Hyperventilation when speaking to or in front of the class • Not listening to class lectures (on account of worrying about unrelated topics) • Not turning in homework because it is partially completed • Receiving detention from teachers and being made fun of by other students for fidgeting during class 			
Areas of Difficulty	Accommodations	Person Responsible	Date Reviewed
Test anxiety	Tests will be given verbally	Primary teacher	
Social anxiety	Not required to read out loud or work on the board in front of the class	Primary teacher	
Listening during class	Allowed to draw, as needed, during class	Primary teacher	
Not turning in homework	Breaking assignments down into smaller pieces	Primary teacher	
Fidgeting	The first five minutes of class can be spent exercising in the back of the classroom	Primary teacher	

What additional supports might you recommend that are not listed on this 504?

Do you believe this student could be successful in a general education classroom?

Yes

No

Other: _____

Imagining that Sam was a student in your current classroom, please answer the following questions.

Accommodation 1: Tests will be given verbally.

How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1 2 3 4 5

Not confident at all Very confident

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1 2 3 4 5

Not reasonable at all Very reasonable

Accommodation 2: Not required to read aloud or work on the board in front of the class.

How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1 2 3 4 5

Not confident at all Very confident

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1 2 3 4 5

Not reasonable at all Very reasonable

Accommodation 3: Allowed to draw, as needed, in class.

How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1 2 3 4 5

Not confident at all Very confident

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1 2 3 4 5

Not reasonable at all Very reasonable

Accommodation 4: Breaking assignments down into smaller pieces.

How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not confident at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

How reasonable is this accommodation?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not reasonable at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very reasonable

Accommodation 5: The first 5 minutes of class can be spent exercising in the back of the classroom.

How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not confident at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

How reasonable is this accommodation?

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not reasonable at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very reasonable

What supports do you currently have to provide accommodations? What leads to your self-efficacy?

What barriers do you anticipate if you were expected to implement Sam's 504 Plan? What support would you need?

**Appendix B
Survey Responses**

	Yes	No	It depends
Have you ever implemented or carried out a 504 Plan?	60%	40%	N/A
Are you aware of how to provide 504 accommodations?	73.3%	0%	26.7%
Do you know when to recommend a student for a 504 Plan?	80%	20%	N/A
Do you believe this student could be successful in a general education classroom?	86.7%	6.7%	6.7%

By Accommodation

Accommodation 1: Tests will be given verbally. How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1= Not at all confident	2	3	4	5= Very confident
13.3%	13.3	20%	0%	53.3%

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1= Not reasonable at all	2	3	4	5= Very reasonable
0%	20%	6.7%	20%	53.3%

Accommodation 2: Not required to read outloud or work on the board in front of the class. How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1= Not at all confident	2	3	4	5= Very confident
0%	0%	13.3%	6.7%	80%

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1= Not reasonable at all	2	3	4	5= Very reasonable
0%	6.7%	26.7%	33.3%	33.3%

Accommodation 3: Allowed to draw as needed during class. How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1= Not at all confident	2	3	4	5= Very confident
0%	0%	0%	26.7%	73.3%

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1= Not reasonable at all	2	3	4	5= Very reasonable
0%	0%	0%	40%	60%

Accommodation 1: Tests will be given verbally. How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1= Not at all confident	2	3	4	5= Very confident
13.3%	13.3	20%	0%	53.3%

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1= Not reasonable at all	2	3	4	5= Very reasonable
0%	20%	6.7%	20%	53.3%

Accommodation 4: Breaking assignments down into smaller pieces. How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1= Not at all confident	2	3	4	5= Very confident
--------------------------------	----------	----------	----------	--------------------------

		6.7%	13.3%	80%
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How reasonable is this accommodation?

1= Not reasonable at all	2	3	4	5= Very reasonable
0%	6.7%	0%	6.7%	86.7%

Accommodation 5: The first 10 minutes of class can be spent exercising in the back of the classroom or the gym. How confident are you that you could implement this accommodation in your classroom?

1= Not at all confident	2	3	4	5= Very confident
6.7%	26.7%	26.7%	6.7%	33.3%

How reasonable is this accommodation?

1= Not reasonable at all	2	3	4	5= Very reasonable
13.3%	26.7%	26.7%	13.3%	20%

Appendix C
Interview Protocol

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers define the successful usage of 504 Plans?
2. Do teachers have district support when fulfilling 504 Plans? If so, what does that look like?
3. Do teachers believe that they should play a role in supporting student’s mental health? If so, what should a teachers’ role be? If not, why?
4. What are the next or disruptive steps to improving 504 Plans from a general education teacher perspective?

Questions	What am I trying to learn	How I know I’ve got it
What do you teach, and why did you choose that subject?	This is another ice breaker question to ease participants into the interview. It will also help me understand their passions and attitudes.	When the teacher smiles, or intenses, it will help me to know they are ready for other questions.
Why did you go into education?	This is an ice breaker question to ease participants into the interview. It will also help me understand their passions and attitudes.	When the teacher smiles, or intenses, it will help me to know they are ready for other questions.
If you were talking to someone who is not an educator, how would you describe accommodation? (1)⁵	What is their attitude and understanding of accommodation?	When the teacher has given an honest answer (this may mean they look uncomfortable or excited to share) in layman's terms.
Can you tell me of a time when you felt that you implemented or carried out a 504 plan well? (1) If unanswered: What supports did you receive or have available to make it successful? (2)	What made the implementation successful and how do they know?	When the teacher addresses any supports they had in the 504 Plan process, how this instance was different from others and/or steps they took to be successful.

⁵ The number following each question indicates which research question that it aligns with.

What advice would you give teachers who are implementing 504 Plans for the first time? (4)	Information that teachers felt was missing from their training, what could improve future training and teacher experience.	When I learn something new or valuable (given that I have not had training on 504 Plans).
If you were talking to someone who is not an educator, how would you describe the mental health of students and teachers in your school? (3)	Opinions on the impact of school on student's mental health.	When the teacher has given an honest answer (this may mean they look uncomfortable or excited to share) in layman's terms.
Do you believe that teachers should play a role in supporting students' mental health? If so, what should a teachers' role be? If not, why? (3)	Attitudes toward mental health, and ability to provide mental health supports.	When the teacher addresses what responsibilities they should have and to what extent OR what is preventing them from taking responsibility.
If 504 Plans no longer existed/you could start from scratch, what would you want to replace it? (4)	The next and disruptive steps in the 504 Plan process.	When the teacher has addressed something that does and does not work in the 504 Plan process and a possible solution.
Is there anything else you would like to add?	If they had anything to add that I did not think of.	

Appendix D Student Support Spreadsheet

Student Name	Study Guides	Extended Time	Test Read	Pref. Seating	Graphic Organizer	Chunking	Alt. Testing Location	Guided Reading Q's	Copy of Notes	Other
	X									Larger Text
	X	X		X						
	X	X	X		X		X	X		
	X	X	X	X	X		X			Nurse, bathroom
	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			Self-edit checklist
										Audio
										Nurse
		X			X	X	X		X	
		X					X			
		X					X			
		X	X	X	X		X			
		X				X	X		X	
		X	X				X			
	X	X			X		X		X	
	X	X	X	X			X			
	X	X		X	X		X			Self-edit checklist, movement breaks
	X	X		X			X		X	
	X	X	X	X			X			Student services, fidget
	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	One test page at a time
		X					X			
		X		X			X			Fidget
		X		X			X			Movement breaks
		X		X	X	X	X			Fidget, movement, student services
		X		X			X			Movement breaks
	X	X		X	X		X			