

Accommodations, Not Advantages

EDITORIAL BOARD VOTE: 15-1

To provide equitable opportunities for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and 504 plans, **AWARENESS IS CRITICAL**



This illustration is meant to highlight how giving the same resources, like ladders, to people with different needs may be equal, but not equitable. In order to accommodate everyone, we must provide resources that make sense for different situations.

NOT EVERYONE THINKS THE SAME.

While it is widely acknowledged that we all have different ideas, many are less willing to discuss the fact that we also get to these ideas differently.

Educational institutions have taken steps to ensure they accommodate all types of thinking. According to The National Center for Education Statistics, 15% of all public school students in the nation study under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which guarantees accessible education for all disabled students. It is impossible for one school system to suit all students' learning needs, but with accommodation and support in place, we can try to create fair opportunities for all.

Two years prior to the enactment of IEP, the 1973 Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act included the premise of 504 plans and addressed how the rights of individuals with disabilities must be protected in all programs that receive federal funding — namely education. Considering the act is only 50 years old, we must continue to advocate for their execution in our classrooms.

Our school currently has 280 students who are registered to receive some additional educational programming or accommodations.

504 plans focus on providing specific accommodations to students within the learning environment, while IEPs often consist of measurable goals to facilitate learning by providing an aid, occupational therapy, or other free services to students.

These accommodations for each student are not meant to be equal, they are meant to be equitable. Having extra time on tests is not an advantage for students whose minds digest information in a different way.

Students who receive accommodations can suffer from a wide variety of conditions including chronic pain and dyslexia. Each accommodation is based strictly on what is needed to support that student's needs.

The school-based team — special education coordinator Amy Atwell, assistant principal William Clark, school psychologist Tiffany Kirzner, and behavioral health professional Becca Mroczkowski — aims to create methods of support for issues. When they become aware of a student in need of behavioral, academic, or emotional help, they work with that student and their teachers to find solutions.

Unfortunately, despite this process, a research study from Journal of Health and Social Behavior noted that being labeled with learning disabilities can have severe negative effects “mechanized through parents’ and particularly teachers’ lower expectations.” And according to the federal bullying agency Stop Bullying, students with disabilities or other learning challenges are at a much higher risk of being picked on when compared to their peers.

Despite this, a casual survey of 865 students conducted by *The Muse*

through English classes in January revealed that 90.4% of students who self-reported having a 504 or IEP think that most or all students respect their plan, and 86.9% of them think that most or all teachers respect their plan.

Though there is relatively high support on campus, it is important to avoid assuming things about anyone based on their disabilities. In anonymous comments from the survey, students expressed that their accommodations are very diverse, with some based on anxiety or depression and others based on physical disabilities. Several students emphasized that their plans don't provide better treatment when compared to others, it simply is a way to “level the playing field” as one student reported.

Ms. Atwell notes that compared to her knowledge of other local schools, we are very fortunate here for the resources and staff members who are accessible for students. Not all schools, whether due to their larger student body size or funding, can boast about the same qualified staff that we have here to support us.

These accommodations are an integral aspect of our education system, and we must continue to support those who need them.

For those who notice any student being mistreated based on differing abilities related to the topics in this editorial, please report to administration.

contributor: Makena Senzon
graphics: Angelyna Rodriguez
design: Mariana Colom