

TOPIC BRIEF:

Accommodation Guidelines for Students with Disabilities

Accommodations are part of planning effective instructional programs for students with disabilities. Many students with disabilities need only small changes to the way they are instructed and tested to be able to participate and be successful in general education classes. Assessment accommodations are changes in testing materials or procedures that enable students to participate in assessments in a way that assesses abilities rather than disabilities. Without accommodations, the assessment may not accurately measure the student's knowledge and skills.

Adaptations, accommodations, and modifications need to be individualized for students, based upon their needs and their personal learning styles. Accommodation decisions are not made based on the category of disability.

Classroom instruction may be accommodated in many ways.

Scheduling, for example

- giving the student extra time to complete assignments or tests
- breaking up testing over several days

Setting, for example

- working in a small group
- working one-on-one with teacher

Materials, for example

- providing audio copies of lectures or books
- giving copies of teacher's lecture notes
- using large print, Braille, or digital text

Instruction, for example

- reducing reading level
- reducing number of problems/questions
- using a student/peer tutor

Student Response, for example

- allowing answers orally or dictated
- using a computer for written work
- using sign language, a communication device, or native language

Students with physical or mental disabilities who do not currently receive special education services or who do not have a current IEP may also be considered for and provided accommodations, if appropriate. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides the right to accommodations to all Americans with disabilities. Your

school district develops 504 plans for these students. These plans must be reviewed periodically.

To decide appropriate accommodations, the following questions may be discussed:

- Does the student have the fundamental skills that are needed for this grade level or course?
- Does the student have the necessary background knowledge or experiences?
- How independent is the student in completing assignments?
- Does the student work as fast as do other students in the class?
- What kinds of tests or assignments are typically used in this program?
- Can the student be expected to use the same kind of books and instructional resources as other students?
- Can a tutoring or buddy program be used?
- How can the behavior management strategies used in the classroom be adapted to support the student's need for structure and limits?
- Will accommodations be needed in the physical learning environment?
- Will teachers need extra support to work with this student?

Decisions about accommodations for instruction and assessment for an individual student should be based on the following principles:

Accommodations should facilitate the demonstration of what the student knows or can do as independently as possible.

Accommodations must be necessary for the student to be able to learn and ultimately demonstrate mastery of knowledge or skills.

Accommodations must not provide the student with an unfair advantage or interfere with the validity of tests.

Accommodations in state and district tests must be the same, or nearly the same, as adaptations used by the student in completing classroom instruction and assessment activities.



DON'T DO IT ALONE

Collaboration is a must when providing accommodations for a student with a disability. Responsibility for the student's educational program rests with many individuals. Some schools have special education teachers who provide consultation services. Other schools schedule common planning periods so teachers can work together. Professional support from staff in guidance, school health, vision, speech/language, or adaptive physical education can be obtained, if needed. You have the support of a team.

Keep your door open for input and ideas about working with a student with a disability. When you are experiencing problems, don't be afraid to ask for assistance. You may find that other teachers have had the same problems and are willing to share successful solutions. Don't forget about talking with the student's parents or the student.



ASSESSMENT

As the first option, the IEP team should consider statewide or district-wide assessment without accommodations. Teams should review the accommodations that the student currently uses to access the general curriculum and determine if some or all of these accommodations are necessary for the student to participate in the statewide or district-wide assessment.

Accommodations must be the same, or nearly the same as used by the student in completing classroom instruction or assessment activities.

Assessment accommodations are generally grouped into the following categories:

- Presentation (e.g., repeat directions, read aloud, large print, braille, etc.)
- Equipment and material (e.g., calculator, amplification equipment, manipulatives, etc.)
- Response (e.g., mark answers in book, scribe records response, point, etc.)

- Setting (e.g., study carrel, student's home, separate room, etc.)
- Timing/Scheduling (e.g., extended time, frequent breaks, etc.)

A standard accommodation is a change in the testing environment, procedures, or presentation that does not alter what the test measures or the comparability of scores. The purpose of accommodations is to enable students to participate in an assessment in a way that allows knowledge and skills to be assessed rather than disabilities.

If a test change affects item or test validity, it is a non-standard accommodation.

A link to a list of current standard and non-standard accommodations is at <http://ed.sc.gov> under the Office of Exceptional Children. Look for Testing Information.

DID IT WORK?

The value of any accommodation is measured in terms of its impact on the performance and attitude of the student with a disability. Some things to consider when reflecting on the impact of an accommodation include:

- Did the student actually use and take advantage of the accommodation?
- Was the student able to participate fully in the activity because of the accommodation?
- Was the student able to master the objectives of the lesson or course because of the accommodation?
- Did the accommodation help the student to feel he or she belongs in the class?

If the answer to all these questions is "Yes," then the accommodation is doing what was intended. If the answer to any of these questions is "No," then you need to do some troubleshooting to find out why the accommodation isn't working as planned. You may need to use a different type of accommodation or you may need to think about the expectations for this student.

