

## **Considerations: Reasonable and Effective Accommodations**

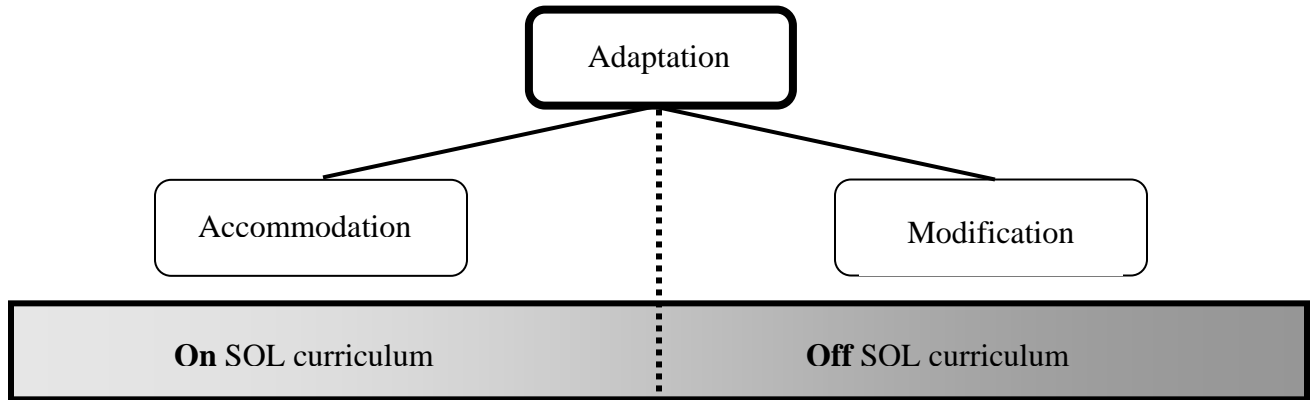
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Individualized Educational Program (IEP) planning teams are faced with the challenge of having to determine the accommodations and modifications students with disabilities must receive in order to access and make progress in the general education curriculum. How do IEP teams identify reasonable and effective general accommodations? How do teachers apply the general accommodations to specific learning situations? This *Considerations Packet* defines accommodations, differentiates them from modifications and adaptations, and addresses their specific purpose. Three processes for determining “reasonable” accommodations are presented, and examples of various types of accommodations are given.

### **Definition**

Educators use many different words to describe the purposeful changes they make to enable student learning. What do educators mean by *accommodation*, *modification*, or *adaptation*? Unfortunately, these terms are often used interchangeably, although they have different meanings. For the purposes of this *Considerations Packet*, the terms and their meanings are as follows:

- Accommodation Purposeful changes educators make to the:
- environment* where, when, and with whom students learn
  - instruction* how teachers teach so students learn
  - assessment* how students demonstrate what they learn
  - curriculum* what the teacher teaches
- so that **all** students can learn and validly demonstrate what they learned. An accommodation adjusts the conditions under which students accomplish tasks (i.e., the *environment* and *instruction*) without substantially changing the *assessments* or *curriculum*. Students remain eligible for the Advanced Standard, Standard, or Modified Standard Diplomas.
- Modification **Significant** purposeful changes teachers make to *assessments* or *curriculum* that result in moving **students with disabilities** off the local curriculum based on the Standards of Learning Teacher Curriculum Framework. A modification is a substantial change to assessments (non-standard or Alternate) or curriculum (specially designed to meet the students’ needs). As a result, students become eligible for the Special Diploma or Certificate of Program Completion and ineligible for the diploma options mentioned above.
- Adaptation Either an *accommodation* or *modification*.



Consider the following examples:

- Mr. Zins is providing accommodations through adjustments in instruction by using a graphic organizer. He is not modifying the curriculum or assessments.
- Ms. Holt, a second-grade teacher, provides Jessie, a fully included seven-year-old with developmental delay, with a quiet corner to listen to a book on tape during silent reading. Ms. Holt is providing environmental (quiet space) and instructional (auditory and visual input) accommodations.
- Mr. Jackman teaches Braille to Cassandra, an 11-year-old who is blind. This is a curriculum modification, a significant change in content typically taught to fifth graders. Once Cassandra learns Braille, using it will become an accommodation, simply a change in instructional materials. She will be eligible for the Advanced or the Standard Diploma.
- Mrs. Fernandez, a high school special educator, teaches a life skills class to six students with moderate to severe mental retardation. Mrs. Fernandez modifies the curriculum to meet her students' needs. She provides assessment modification (Alternate Assessment). Her students will receive a Special Diploma or Certificate of Program Completion. They will not be eligible for the Standard or Modified Standard Diploma.

### Purpose

The purpose of providing accommodations is to enable students with disabilities to gain equal access to educational and extracurricular activities. In other words, accommodations are intended to level the playing field and provide equal opportunity for success (Smith, 2002). Accommodations minimize the impact of a disability and circumvent deficiencies in specific academic areas (Bergeson, 2001). They are the *ramp to the learning highway*.

### Process

Determining reasonable and effective accommodations can be a complex task. A checklist or menu approach may save time; however, it rarely affords teams the opportunity to design truly individualized accommodations based on student's needs. The checklist approach may result in too many accommodations, because all the choices look good. Instead, a process approach consists of a careful review of the student's strengths and needs, an analysis of the classroom and

curriculum demands, and then addresses the necessary accommodations. A number of processes for determining appropriate accommodations are available. They all include multiple steps and require a team approach.

Some processes are more helpful for determining *universal accommodations*. That is, accommodations that are applied across all school contexts, all subject areas, and related activities. IEP teams usually determine this type of accommodation. Oral administration of tests, provision of class notes, preferential seating away from glare, or a second set of textbooks for use at home are examples of universal accommodations.

Other processes are helpful for determining *situational or “on-the-spot” accommodations*. Situational accommodations are determined for units of instruction, special situations, and in response to changing conditions. These accommodations are made collaboratively by the instructional team--teachers and paraeducators, prior to instruction and individually during instruction. Providing students with a structure for note taking, reducing the number of math problems required for a specific homework assignment, or allowing more movement on days when a student is more agitated than usual are examples of “on-the-spot” accommodations. Typically, the instances in which professionals use their judgment in order to accommodate a student’s day-to-day needs are not addressed by IEP teams.

### **Questions to Address in Determining Accommodations**

Accommodations must be both reasonable and effective. Reasonable accommodations can be made with a minimum of preparation or change in routine. They are age-appropriate. Effective accommodations enable students to succeed and lead to independence.

The following questions may be helpful to teams as they consider which accommodations are reasonable and effective for a given student (Friend & Bursuck, 1999).

<b>Who</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who will be responsible for preparing the accommodation?</li><li>• Who will be responsible for implementing the accommodation?</li><li>• Who will monitor the accommodation’s implementation and effectiveness?</li><li>• Who is going to pay for the costs of the accommodation?</li><li>• Who needs to know about the accommodation?</li><li>• Has everyone, including the student, agreed to the accommodation?</li></ul>
<b>What</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What previous responsibilities must the preparer(s) give up in order to add this responsibility?</li><li>• What resources, space, and equipment will be required for making and implementing the accommodation?</li><li>• What is the timeline for implementing and evaluating the accommodation?</li><li>• Will the accommodation lead to the student’s independence?</li></ul>
<b>Where and When</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will the accommodation be easy to implement?</li><li>• Where and when will the accommodation be prepared?</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where and when will the accommodation be implemented?</li> <li>• Where and when can the accommodation be implemented so that it does not put the student in an unfavorable position?</li> </ul>
<p><b>How</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much time will be required for making the accommodation?</li> <li>• How will the quality of the accommodation be monitored and evaluated?</li> <li>• How will the effectiveness of the accommodation be determined?</li> <li>• How will the intent or purpose of the accommodation be communicated to the student?</li> <li>• How does the accommodation fit with the student's present levels of educational performance and annual goals?</li> <li>• How does the accommodation benefit the student?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Other</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the planned accommodation the least intrusive of the alternatives?</li> <li>• Will the accommodation be effective for the student?</li> <li>• Is this an isolated, one-time accommodation or an ongoing practice?</li> <li>• Is the planned accommodation age-appropriate?</li> <li>• Will the accommodation be used only when necessary?</li> <li>• Will the accommodation enable the student to obtain the chosen diploma?</li> </ul>

Two processes for determining reasonable and effective accommodations are included in this packet. The first process, *Steps and Tools for Planning Individualized Adaptations* (Janney & Snell, 2000), may be more helpful when planning universal accommodations for students with moderate disabilities.

**Step 1** Gather information.

What are the demands of the classroom?

All members of the instructional team need to know the unique structure, instructional activities, curriculum, climate, and routines of the classrooms in which the student will be instructed.

Where is the student now?

The instructional team needs to know the appropriate instructional goals for the student and how the student learns. Present-level-of-performance descriptions, annual goals, and objectives/benchmarks from the IEP need to be shared with all team members.

What accommodations will improve the fit between the student and the classroom while also ensuring a sense of belonging and achievement?

**Step 2** Determine when accommodations are needed.

The team considers under what conditions accommodations will be needed. For example: small group work, tests, lecture, discussion, independent reading, watching films, or oral reading.

**Step 3** Decide on planning strategies.

The team next determines how and when the accommodation will be planned and monitored. The amount of time this step takes depends on the extent of the student's needs and the number of different settings in which the student participates.

**Step 4** Plan and implement general accommodations.

General universal accommodations do not require weekly or daily planning. They are usually specified on an IEP. Examples of general accommodations include peer assistance for reading a text, prompts to record an assignment, assistance with reading directions, use of a computer for writing assignments, and oral test administration.

**Step 5** Plan and implement specific accommodations.

Once general accommodations are in place, specific accommodations need to be designed for individual lessons or activities. Weekly or daily planning is needed.

**Step 6** Plan and implement alternative activities (modifications).

Alternative activities are needed when a student's IEP objectives cannot be met within the context of the inclusive setting. Examples of alternative activities include the development of motor activities, instruction in basic reading or math, opportunities to preview or review material, and functional skill routines.

The second process may be more appropriate for decision making for students with mild to moderate disabilities (Deschenes, Ebeling, & Sprague, 1994). It may be most helpful for determining situational or contextual accommodations.

**Step 1** Select the subject area to be taught.

**Step 2** Identify the specific topic to be taught.

**Step 3** Briefly identify the curricular goals for most learners.

**Step 4** Briefly identify the instructional plan for most learners.

**Step 5** Identify students who will need accommodations.

**Step 6** Choose an appropriate accommodation or a mix of accommodations based on individual student goals and skills. Start with the least intrusive accommodation.

- *Size*: change the number of items to be learned or completed
- *Time*: extend or shorten the time allotted for learning, task completion, or testing
- *Level of support*: increase the amount of personal assistance (peer buddies, teaching assistants, peer tutors, cross-age tutors)
- *Input*: vary the way instruction is delivered (use different visual aids, concrete examples,

hands-on activities, cooperative groups)

- *Difficulty*: accommodate for the skill level, problem type, or the rules for how the learner may approach the work (allow calculator, simplify directions, change rules)
- *Output*: change how the student responds to instruction (verbal instead of written responses, drawing or outlining instead of writing, demonstration)
- *Participation*: change the extent to which a learner is actively involved in the task
- *Alternate goals*: change the goals or outcome expectations while using the same materials

**Step 7** Evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations; monitor, and adjust while teaching.

### **Environmental Accommodations**

The purpose of environmental or ecological accommodations is to help enable students with social, behavioral, emotional, and/or educational needs to cope with the demands of the environment while learning new skills. These accommodations can be grouped into three categories: where instruction takes place, when instruction takes place, and who is present during instruction.

Where (place)

- Select general educational setting: classroom, library, auditorium
- Provide alternative work space that is larger or quieter: rug area, table, hallway, guidance office, study carrel
- Assign preferential seating for visual, auditory, or attention concerns near the teacher's desk, out of high-traffic areas, facing away from the light, near chalkboard or overhead, source of light on teacher's lips, removed from distractions like heating units or fish tank, away from windows
- Free workspace of unneeded materials

When (schedule)

- Post schedule and homework assignments in consistent place daily
- Provide for movement ahead of or behind other students
- Prepare for transitions and schedule changes
- Arrange more difficult subjects early in the day
- Plan frequent breaks with or without movement
- Schedule time or organization of belongings, papers, books
- Provide a time-line for long-term projects

Who (people)

- Change teacher for different subject
- Reduce teacher-pupil ratio
- Separate from poor peer models
- Change number of peers with whom student is grouped for instruction
- Provide peer buddies, peer partners, volunteers, paraprofessional support

## **Instructional Accommodations**

Instructional accommodations are adjustments instructional staff make in the presentation of lessons, the materials used, the amount and type of practice, and the level of student involvement. Most of these adjustments are made prior to teaching lessons; some are made during teaching.

Instructional staff are encouraged to use a variety of teaching methods such as self-directed study, language experience approach, group investigations, discovery learning, learning centers, demonstrations, games, role-play, simulation, multi-media, and field trips.

The following chart provides examples of instructional accommodations that help students with disabilities do the same work as their peers. Based on abilities and needs, the student does...

- |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • the <b>same work</b> as peers                                                             | with adequate think time, meaningful examples, verbal cues of important information, overview and review, repetition of important information, monitoring, summaries, increased guided practice, active learning opportunities, feedback |
| • the <b>same work with extra tools</b>                                                     | calculator, tape recorder, computer, graphic organizers, study guides, set of notes, self-correcting materials                                                                                                                           |
| • the <b>same work with help from peers</b>                                                 | peer-mediated practice, peer tutoring, paired reading, cooperative learning                                                                                                                                                              |
| • the <b>same work with adjusted expectations</b>                                           | shortened assignment, change in response method                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| • the <b>same work</b> as the peers <b>with a similar assignment</b>                        | research presentation instead of a research paper                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| • a <b>similar activity</b> with <b>different materials</b>                                 | different spelling or vocabulary words, math problems with lower digits                                                                                                                                                                  |
| • something in the <b>same subject</b> with a <b>similar activity and adapted materials</b> | an adjusted sequence of instruction, fewer or different vocabulary words written on the computer                                                                                                                                         |
| • something in the <b>same subject with a parallel activity</b>                             | keyboarding during cursive writing instruction                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| • something in a <b>different subject</b>                                                   | extra instruction or practice on a deficit skill                                                                                                                                                                                         |

- something in **another skill area outside the classroom** one-on-one counseling, therapy, resource support

Adapted from The MESH Manual for Inclusive Schools (p.80), by Kurlinski, et al., 1997  
Olympia, WA: Office of Supervision of Public Instruction.

### **Assessment Accommodations**

Assessment is the process through which instructional staff determine how much and how well students have learned. Assessment accommodations allow students to demonstrate knowledge and skills without compromising the information being evaluated. They include assessment practices such as extending time limits, giving oral instead of written tests, and providing a distraction-free environment.

IEP teams determine accommodations used on a daily basis and those used during state assessments. Students must use allowable and daily-practice accommodations on state assessments. State assessments classify accommodations as either standard or non-standard and specify allowable procedures. Students who pass an assessment, whether with no accommodations, standard accommodations, or non-standard accommodations, have passed the assessment. Appropriate standard and non-standard administration guidelines vary across instruments and among subtests. Consult with your school division's Director of Testing, Special Education Director, and/or visit the DOE website for specific allowable accommodations.

Assessment accommodations are categorized as setting, timing/scheduling, presentation, or response.

#### **Setting**

- Provide preferential seating in front of room or study carrel, with special lighting, with noise buffers, or minimal distractions
- Test in small groups or individually
- Provide adaptive or special furniture
- Test in a hospital or home

#### **Timing/Scheduling**

- Administer test in several sessions, at the best time of day for the student, for the length of time the student can concentrate
- Administer test over several days
- Allow long breaks between subtests and during a subtest when needed
- Extend time on subtests
- Change the order of tests administered

#### **Presentation**

- Use large print and allow ample space between test items
- Provide a word bank for fill-in-the-blank items
- Provide an example for each type of test item



- Provide the appropriate format: Braille, large print (test booklet and answer document)
- Provide magnifying glass, templates, mask or markers to maintain place
- Increase size of answer bubbles
- Simplify oral or written directions, highlight important words in the directions or items
- Interpret oral and written directions (e.g., signing, cued speech), read embedded directions and sample items
- Read test items or provide audio-tape versions of test items and ask students to interpret them
- Interpret embedded directions and sample items to students (e.g., signing, cued speech)
- Provide special equipment for amplification (e.g., hearing aid or auditory trainer) or communication board/pictorial presentation

### Response

- Transfer answers to answer sheet after student marks in test booklet
- Provide four-function calculator, abacus, or arithmetic tables
- Provide appropriate assistive technology such as large-diameter pencil, pencil grip, Braille, Braille answer sheet, augmentative communication device, word processor, computer, typewriter, communication board, pictorial presentation
- Mark answer sheet after student responds orally
- Allow student to use a spelling dictionary
- Provide a scribe, the student may or may not recopy the material

### Conclusion

Planning, providing, and evaluating the effectiveness of accommodations for students with disabilities is a complex process. The IEP team is responsible for developing general accommodations to be used across varying educational settings. The instructional team applies the general accommodations to specific settings. Reasonable and effective accommodations provide students with disabilities the opportunity to access and make progress in the general education curriculum.

### References

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- Deschenes, C., Ebeling, D., & Sprague, J. (1994). *Adapting curriculum and instruction in inclusive classrooms: A teacher's desk reference*. Bloomington, IN: Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities.
- Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. (1999). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Janney, R., & Snell, M. (2000). *Modifying schoolwork*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing Co.
- Kurlinski, E., Gallucci, C., Grainger, D., & Grummick, S. (1997). *The MESH manual for inclusive schools*. Olympia, WA: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction..
- Smith, T. (May, 2002) Section 504: What teachers need to know. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 37(5), p. 3.

The following websites contain further information on Accommodations.

- an **ACCESSible** resource

- [www.smsu.edu/Access/fact16.htm](http://www.smsu.edu/Access/fact16.htm)
- Adaptations and Modifications  
[home.sprintmail.com/~ory64/advocat\\_adapt.htm](http://home.sprintmail.com/~ory64/advocat_adapt.htm)
- Classroom Accommodations  
<http://ldonline.org>  
Unit Modifications  
[www.powerof2.org/](http://www.powerof2.org/)
- Accommodations and Modifications: Adjusting the Classroom Experience  
[schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=306&g=2&print=Y](http://schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=306&g=2&print=Y)

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