

TAP C – Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities in Adult Education Programs

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INTRODUCTION

The Practitioners' Task Force on Adults with Learning Disabilities, in conjunction with the Division of Workforce Education, Adult Education Programs and GED, authored a set of three Technical Assistance Papers (TAPs) focusing on students in adult education programs with learning disabilities. The TAPs are written for adult educators. They are designed to meet the needs of adult education students and to increase their success. Adult educators are encouraged to order all three TAPs, however they may also be ordered individually. The Technical Assistance Papers include:

TAP A- The Rights and Responsibilities of Adults with Learning Disabilities and The Responsibilities of Service Providers

TAP B- Screening for Learning Disabilities in Adult Education Programs

TAP C- Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities in Adult Education Programs

Adult educators may access these Technical Assistance Papers several ways:

(1) Adult Education Programs and GED Programs website

http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/adult_ed.asp

(2) Order through The Florida Department of Education, Career Planning and Product Distribution Website

http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/pdf/products_catalog.pdf

(3) Through Florida TechNet Website

<http://www.floridatechnet.org/ld>

If you have questions, contact:

Teresa Bestor, Director

Adult Education Programs and GED

(850) 245-9906

SECTION 1 – OVERVIEW, REGULATIONS, AND GLOSSARY

Overview

TAP C: Accommodations for Students with Learning Disabilities in Adult Education Programs - This TAP addresses instructional and testing accommodations for students with learning disabilities in adult education programs. A multi-step process for requesting and obtaining appropriate accommodations is described. The goal is to ensure students' individual needs are met, thus increasing student success. Resources for students and educators (e.g., websites) are also listed.

This TAP is intended to provide local adult education administrators and instructors with guidance and information about providing appropriate accommodations for adults with learning disabilities. Although most of the information provided pertains to all students with disabilities, this document focuses on accommodations for students with learning disabilities in adult education programs. The following areas are addressed:

- Federal and State regulations
- Glossary
- Rights and Responsibilities in the Accommodation Process
- Screening Process
- Disclosing and Documenting a Disability
- Section 504 Accommodation Plan samples
- The Accommodation Process
- Instructional and Assessment Accommodations
- Classroom Testing Accommodations
- Standardized and Alternative Assessments for Students with Learning Disabilities
- Basic Skills Exemption
- Assistive Technology
- General Educational Development (GED) Tests and Accommodations

Additionally, this technical assistance paper provides guidelines for local providers on adopting a policy that addresses the provision of accommodations for adult learners with learning disabilities. This would include a section on procedures that would allow adult learners to pursue further action if accommodations are not provided. To ensure a successful policy implementation, it is recommended that local providers identify a Section 504 Designee to ensure compliance with federal, state and local policies.

Federal and State Regulations

An awareness of federal laws and state statutes that protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination, serves as a foundation to better understand accommodations. Below is a summary of federal laws and state statutes that protect

all individuals with disabilities from discrimination, thus enabling them full integration into the mainstream of society. These laws are implemented through policies and procedures, monitored by federal and local governances, and are upheld by the courts.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability in programs which receive or benefit from federal financial assistance. Section 504 indicates that no qualified individual with a disability will be excluded from, denied the benefit of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity that receives Federal financial aid. *(34 CFR Subpart A Section 104.1)*.

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of a disability in employment, public services and transportation, public accommodations and telecommunication. The ADA, which applies to nearly all entities regardless of whether they receive federal funding, expanded the mandate of non-discrimination on the basis of disability established under Section 504. *(28 CFR Subpart A Section 35.101)*.

Section 508 (added to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in 1996 and amended in 1998)

Section 508 requires that electronic and information technologies which are procured, developed, used, and maintained by federal agencies are accessible to people with disabilities, unless it poses an undue burden to do so. Accessibility standards needed to comply with this law were developed by the United States Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board. *(29 U.S.C. § 794)*.

The Florida Educational Equity Act of Florida Statutes, Title XLVII K20 Educational Code, Section 1000.05 (F.S.) 1984 and implemented in 1985

Discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, sex, handicap or marital status against a student or an employee in the state system of public education is prohibited. No person in this state will, on the basis of race, national origin, sex, disability or marital status, be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity, or in any employment conditions or practices by a public educational institution which receives or benefits from federal or state financial assistance *Section 1000.05 (F.S.)*.

Glossary

A thorough understanding of the following terms and definitions is necessary in order to adhere to and embrace the spirit of the laws listed above and to accurately provide appropriate accommodations for adult students with learning disabilities.

Accommodation - Any changes that are made to the way students access information and demonstrate performance. They are in no way intended to modify a program, or give the student with a disability any advantage.

Adult Individual Education Plan (AIEP) - A written plan designed in collaboration with the adult student with disabilities that outlines goals and objectives to be mastered within one year.

Diagnosis/Diagnostician - Confirmation that a condition exists by someone qualified to arrive at such a conclusion. A diagnostician is a professional, such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, neurologist or medical doctor who can perform a diagnostic assessment for disability verification.

Educational Gain (Literacy Completion Point or LCP) - A measurement of improvement in the basic literacy skills of participants in adult general education programs. Gains are determined by comparing entry scores on a state-approved assessment to post-test scores. The gains are based on an increase in educational functioning levels or literacy related tasks in specific content areas.

Essential Functions – These functions include the cognitive, physical, and behavioral abilities necessary for satisfactory completion of a course or program curriculum with or without accommodations.

GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner) - The individual based at the local GED Testing Center responsible for enforcing national and state regulations pertaining to administration of GED Tests. This individual also serves as a liaison between the local testing center and the GED State Administrator.

GED Testing Service (GEDTS) - The agency responsible for the development of policies and procedures regarding GED Testing and the testing program. The official location of the GED web site on the American Council of Education home page is <http://www.acenet.edu//AM/Template.cfm?Section=GEDTS>

Impairment - This is a physiological disorder affecting one or more body systems or a mental or psychological disorder. It is not the name of the impairment or condition that determines whether a person is disabled, but rather, the effect the impairment has on the life functions of the particular person.

Individual with a Disability - As defined by the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, an individual with a disability is any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; has a record of such impairment; or is regarded as having such an impairment.

Learning Disability (LD) – A permanent disorder in one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding, and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or non-verbal means. It manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling,

calculation, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity. LD is an information processing disorder that affects the manner in which individuals with average to above average intelligence learn. Learning disabilities occurs regardless of gender, race, or ethnic origin and is not the result of a poor academic background, mental retardation, or emotional disorders.

Major Life Activities - These activities include self-care activities, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working/employment.

Qualified Individual with a Disability – With respect to postsecondary adult and career/technical education services, a qualified individual with a disability is one who meets the academic and technical standards, with or without an accommodation, requisite to admission or participation in an education program or activity.

Reasonable Accommodations - These are the techniques and/or materials which legally must be allowed or be provided to a “qualified individual with a disability” to enable them to access educational programs and complete school or work assignments with greater ease and effectiveness. The accommodations are not meant to lower the academic standards of the program or give the individual an unfair advantage, but rather to allow the individual to participate on an equal basis.

Section 504 Accommodation Plan – This individual plan outlines accommodations for testing and instruction that will help to ensure equal access to instructional programs for a qualified individual with a documented disability.

Section 504 Designee - An individual who has the responsibility of ensuring that the educational provider is in compliance with federal, state, and local policies relating to Section 504 and ADA. Responsibilities may include; assisting students with the eligibility process, identifying needs and services/accommodations the student will receive, developing a 504 Accommodation Plan, plan implementation and documentation.

State GED Administrator – The individual based at the Florida Department of Education responsible for overseeing jurisdictional (statewide) compliance to national and state regulations pertaining to administration of GED Tests. This individual serves as a liaison between the National GED Testing Service (GEDTS), the Florida Department of Education, and the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner).

“Substantially Limiting” Impairment – Such an impairment prohibits or significantly restricts an individual’s ability to perform a major life activity. The determination of whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity depends on the nature and severity of the impairment, the duration or expected duration of the impairment, and the permanent or long-term impact of the impairment. Short-term, temporary restrictions are generally not substantially limiting, but an impairment does not have to be permanent to rise to the level of a disability. Temporary impairments that take significantly longer than normal to heal,

long-term impairments, or potentially long-term impairments of indefinite duration may be disabilities if they are severe.

SECTION 2 – RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE ACCOMMODATIONS PROCESS

(Also see TAP A, Rights and Responsibilities of Adults with Learning Disabilities and Service Providers)

Rights of Students

Accommodations involve a wide range of techniques and support systems that help individuals with disabilities work around limitations that result from their disability. According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (*34 CFR Subpart A Section 104.1*), if identified and approved accommodations are **not** provided by the educational institution, the adult education student has the right to pursue further action via an established grievance procedure. (*see Appendix A*)

Responsibilities of Students

Students with learning disabilities have the following responsibilities:

- Self-identify in a timely manner that a learning disability exists
- Provide documentation from a qualified source that verifies the nature of the disability, functional limitations, and the need for specific accommodations. (*see Appendix B*)
- Know accommodation needs.
- Self-advocate. (*see Appendix C*)
- Follow specific procedures of the educational facility for obtaining reasonable and appropriate accommodations, academic adjustments and services
- Utilize available support systems and services

Responsibilities of Educational Service Providers

Educational service providers have responsibilities throughout the instructional process including addressing the special needs of students with disabilities (e.g., accommodations).

General Responsibilities

General responsibilities throughout the instructional process include:

- Make students aware of the availability of services and the policies/procedures for accessing them in a timely manner
- Review and revise policies as necessary to avoid discrimination
- Evaluate students and base admission on abilities, not disabilities
- Determine whether or not a particular individual is protected by Section 504/ADA. This is accomplished through careful analysis as to whether a person is an individual with a disability who is eligible to receive aids and services

- Provide reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students who self-disclose their disability and provide the appropriate documentation. This ensures equal access to instructional programs
- Maintain confidentiality
- Ensure that staff is knowledgeable of the student's needs and rights

The Screening Process

(Also see TAP B, Screening for Learning Disabilities in Adult Education Programs)

The screening process involves the adult educator collecting information over time through a variety of sources that could indicate the possibility that an individual has a disability (e.g., learning disability) and may therefore need accommodations. A large percentage of adults with learning and other disabilities in adult education programs are under-identified and under-served, simply because did not self-identify and/or were not screened before any further evaluation were conducted.

Adult students may:

- (a) Not self-identify, not perform well or achieve academic gains over time, or have documentation indicating a disability (LD);
- (a) Self-identify, have documentation with a diagnosis of LD; or
- (c) Self-identify but not have a professional evaluation at this time.

Therefore, the screening process is a critical component of the adult education process. Specifically, the screening process (i.e., screening all students) helps the adult practitioner determine whether a recommendation for a formal evaluation is warranted for an individual student. It is essential that adult educators inform all students of the availability of support (e.g., accommodations) for students with disabilities, the importance of self-identification, and the process of requesting and determining eligibility for accommodations.

Screening instruments helpful to adult educators may be downloaded from the website, <http://www.floridatechnet.org/LD>.

If all students are screened during the intake process, consent is not required. However, should screening be done selectively (based on concern for an individual student), a signed consent form will be required. The results of the screening will help the student and the educator determine if further testing by a diagnostician is warranted. Results of this testing would be needed to document the presence of a disability. This documentation would be required if the student requests accommodations. For excellent recommendations, see the section "Instructional Accommodations," in this TAP.

Disclosing and Documenting a Disability

The decision of whether or not to disclose a learning disability is both a right and a responsibility of adult students. They may choose not to reveal their disability and

elect to participate in a program without special accommodations. However if adult students choose to self-disclose, they must assume the responsibility for providing current documentation of the disability in order to be eligible for special accommodations. It is also their responsibility to seek out the appropriate staff member at their educational setting as early as possible to discuss their needs.

Students should make every effort to have documentation available for review. Various examples of documentation may include:

- A diagnostic assessment from a diagnostician
- Written medical or psychological verification by appropriate professional such as a psychiatrist, psychologist, neurologist or medical doctor
- The most recent Adult Individual Education Plan (AIEP)
- The most recent Transition Individual Education Plan (TIEP) or Individual Education Plan (IEP), including re-evaluation information
- Letters of certification (including diagnoses) from agencies such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Blind Services, and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities

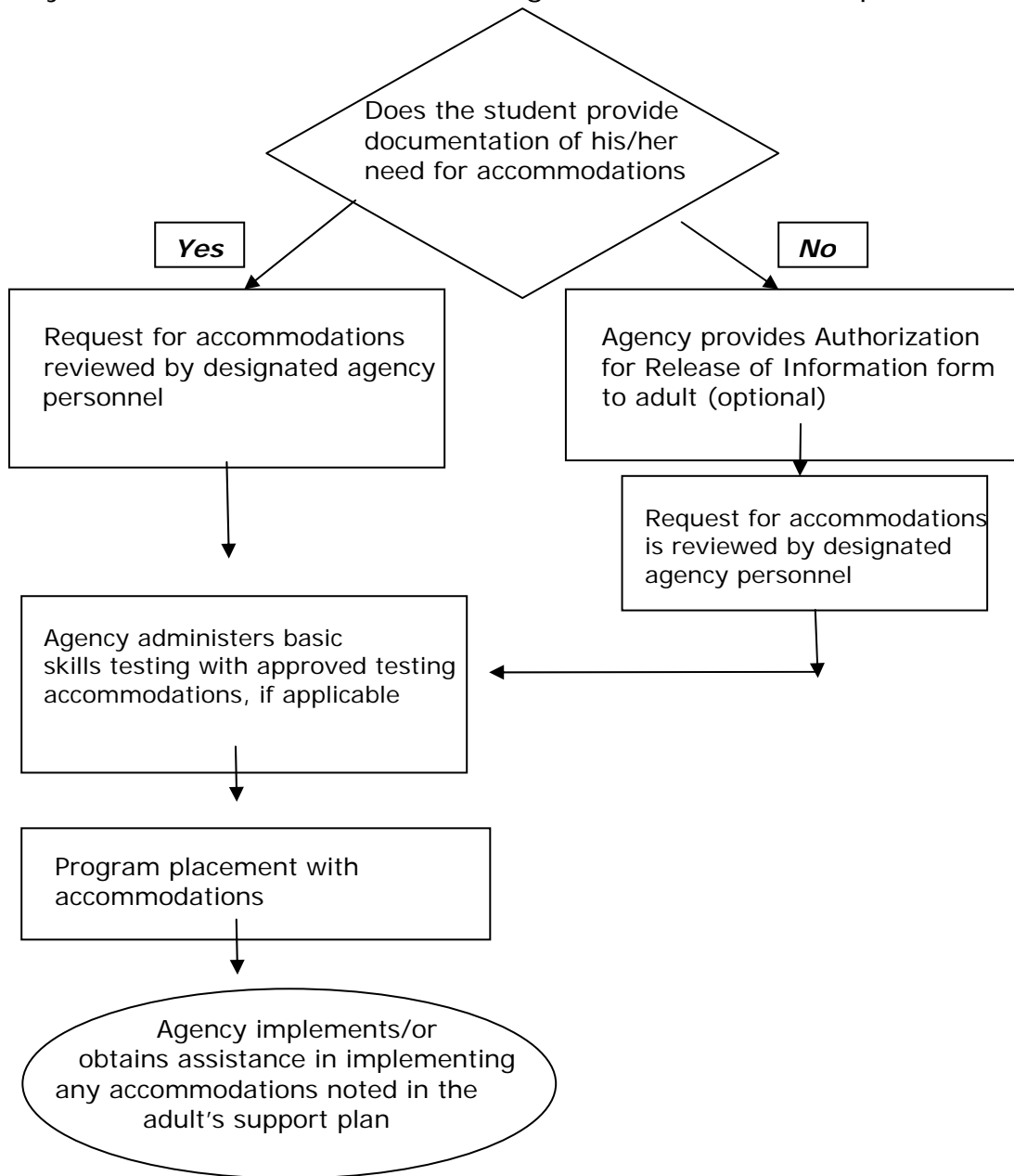
Note: If the student does not have the documentation, then an Authorization to Release Information will need to be completed and sent to the appropriate facility, agency, or professional to release the information. If the student has documentation that is not current or is insufficient as determined by the institution or if the student has no documentation at all, a concerted effort should be made to assist the student in obtaining the needed documentation. *(A sample is provided in Appendix D)*

Developing and Implementing a Section 504 Accommodation Plan *(Also see section "Instructional and Assessment Accommodations")*

The Section 504 Plan (from development through implementation) provides an opportunity to enhance communication with the adult learner. It is recommended that a 504 Plan be developed with every student with a documented disability as part of the process for meeting the student's learning needs. By documenting accommodations in a Section 504 Plan, the provider has evidence that accommodations were identified. *(A sample is provided in Appendix E).*

THE ACCOMMODATION PROCESS

Accommodations involve a wide range of techniques and support systems that help individuals with disabilities that compensate for limitations that result from their disability. Below is a flowchart reflecting the accommodation process:



According to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, if identified and approved accommodations are **not** provided by the educational institution, the adult education student has the right to pursue further action via an established grievance procedure. (see *Appendix F*)

SECTION 3 – INSTRUCTIONAL AND ASSESSMENT ACCOMMODATIONS

The term “accommodations” refers to any changes that are made to the way students access information and demonstrate performance, thereby enabling adults with learning disabilities to fully participate in school.

Instructional Accommodations

This section addresses accommodations that can be used in informal or classroom instruction and are necessary to enable adults with learning disabilities to fully participate in school:

- classroom accommodations make it possible for students to learn, to participate in classroom instruction, and to demonstrate their learning
- classroom testing accommodations make it possible for students to demonstrate what they have learned in ways that bypass or circumvent the features of their disabilities

According to the document, “Creating a Statewide Delivery Model for Adults with Learning Disabilities in Florida,”

<http://www.floridatechnet.org/LD/FINAL%20DRAFT%20-%20AUGUST%202005.pdf>,

many accommodations are indicated for classroom instruction and testing that require little or no expense. This information is also available in the 2005 Examiner’s GED Manual (see *GED Examiners’ Manual: 2005, Section 11*). Examples of instructional accommodations include:

Reading:

- Books-on-tape or someone to make a recording or read the text aloud
- A card or frame to focus on the words and to block out parts of the text
- Assistive devices that translate text to speech--reading pens, Kurzweil reader, scanner with character recognition software
- Videotapes or movies that present the same information
- Interactive CDs or computer-assisted training with auditory and visual cues rather than written descriptions
- Sticky notes or highlighter to mark key points in the textbook or manual
- List of important vocabulary with definitions
- Demonstration of tools and procedures
- Study guide to follow for independent reading
- Complex information divided into chunks or sections
- Hands-on activities, visual aids, pictures, or diagrams to provide alternate ways of learning abstract or complex information
- Large print versions of texts
- Screen reading software
- Books and instructional materials in Braille
- Class handouts and materials in an embossed format
- Special tilt-top desk or book stand to hold materials for easier reading
- Specialized equipment--optical enhancer, magnifier, tape recorder

Listening:

- New vocabulary introduced prior to lesson, a glossary of terms
- Overviews of lesson
- Material presented in a logical manner and with explicit cues to shift from one aspect to the next
- Information broken down into steps or key components
- Important ideas written on the board or overhead transparencies with different colors for emphasis or coding
- Active involvement with the content through discussion, small group interaction, or problem solving activities
- Repetition and summarization of important points, particularly at the conclusion of lecture or discussion
- Structured organizers for note taking, such as a copy of overheads, outline of lecture, or graphic organizer
- Copies of notes taken by other students in the class
- Permission to tape record class lectures and discussions
- Time to meet with instructor after class for clarification
- Description of demonstrations
- Real-life examples and concrete materials
- Visual information (words, charts, graphics) and repetition
- Sign language interpreter or note taker
- Amplification or FM system

Writing:

- Adaptive devices such as pencil grips, special pen or pencil holders, erasable pens, or special paper with raised or color-coded line indicators
- Worksheets and tests with ample space for writing answers
- Two copies of worksheet or test - one to work on as a draft and one to use as a final copy
- Graph paper for writing to help align the numbers in computation problems or organize information
- A thesaurus to find words to write or say
- Special word processing software that anticipates what student is trying to write
- Structured outline or graphic organizer to plan written assignments/presentations
- Permission to use demonstrations or video-recorded responses to classroom assignments
- A spelling dictionary or electronic spelling aid with speech capabilities
- Peer editing or teacher assistance in the revision process
- Content mechanics graded separately in assignments requiring written expression
- A chance to correct identified spelling and grammar errors

Mathematics:

- Concrete materials and manipulatives or computer-based models to understand abstract math concepts
- Calculator for computation tasks

- Talking calculators or on-screen computer calculators
- Flowcharts to plan strategies for problem solving
- Assistance with specialized vocabulary and mathematical symbols
- Additional examples and explanations
- Use of graph paper or color coding to organize answers to math problems
- Review within a day or two of the initial learning of difficult skills and supervised practice to prevent misconceptions
- Special media, assistive technology, and materials

Completing Assignments:

- An agenda or outline of the assignments for each day
- Oral directions combined with pictures, words, or diagrams
- A description or critical features when watching a demonstration
- Directions that are repeated or simplified
- Step-by-step instructions with the steps outlined in writing or shown in picture sequences
- A description of expected behaviors or criteria (rubric) to be used for evaluation
- Assignments divided into parts with corresponding due dates
- An individual responsibility checklist with checkpoints along the way
- A reward system to motivate assignment completion
- Access to learning resources and instructional materials outside of class
- Flexible scheduling practices
- Assignments given ahead of time so that students can get started early

Assessment

Assessment Procedures

Accommodations must provide a framework that allows the learner with a disability to demonstrate the skills and knowledge a test is designed to measure. Upon receiving a request for specific types of accommodations from a learner with a documented disability, due consideration should be given to the options requested by the student. Most test accommodations are based on accommodations used during instruction. All accommodations must be documented in the student's Section 504 Plan, AIEP, or other educational plan (*Florida Department of Education, 2004: Section 504 Accommodation Plan for Postsecondary Adult/Vocational Education Students*; <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/504.pdf>) For additional information on Statewide Assessment for Students with Disabilities, refer to State Board Administrative Rule 6A-1.0943 Florida Administrative Code (FAC) https://www.flrules.org/Gateway/View_notice.asp?id=1050333. This Rule provides the basis for accommodations in Florida's statewide assessment system. Testing accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

Flexible schedule: Several brief testing sessions during a day, frequent rest breaks, or testing at a different time of day

Flexible setting: Testing individually or in small groups with proctor, study carrel or separate room, special lighting, equipment, acoustics

Flexible response: Oral response, signed response, response in test book, response on word processor, or Braille response

Flexible presentation: Mechanical aids, revised formats such as Braille, large print, signed or oral presentations for directions

- **Print Versions.** Students may be tested with enlarged-print materials or with regular print materials enlarged through mechanical or electronic means.
- **Braille Versions.** Students may be tested with materials that have been transformed to Braille or may be tested by using devices which permit optical-to-tactile transformations.
- **Auditory or Sign-Language Presentations.** The test administrator may sign, provide oral interpretations of, or read to students the general directions and the mathematical items. The reading items and passages must be read by the student using visual or tactile means.

Flexible timing: Students may have additional or extended time.

Assistive devices: Assistive devices typically used in classroom instruction such as visual magnification or auditory amplification devices or calculators may be used if authorized in test administration manual.

Classroom Testing

The following accommodations may be provided for students with learning disabilities during classroom testing:

- Test items read aloud or on audiotape, except for tests of reading skills
- Repetition or paraphrasing of the directions during the test
- Important words in the direction underlined or highlighted
- Increased space allowed for test answers
- Permission to dictate or tape record answers on a test
- A typewriter or word processor to write answers to the test items
- Permission to write on the test itself instead of an answer sheet
- Webs, diagrams, or charts and outlines to plan and respond to open-ended or essay questions
- Alternate evaluations of knowledge and skills using products or demonstrations
- Additional time to complete tests
- The test separated into small sections and taken over a period of days
- Breaks during the test period
- Administration of the test individually or in small group
- An enclosed study carrel to take the test
- Extra examples for practice

- Elimination of one of the choices in multiple-choice items
- Fewer questions that measure all required content and skills
- Grading of the student's responses separately for content and mechanics
- Open book test unless memorization or content is required
- Permission to use references such as a spelling dictionary
- A calculator to recheck or complete computations
- Partial credit for answers that are partly correct
- Copies of the test on audiotape, in Braille, or in large print format
- Assistive technology for magnification
- Use of a Braille writer
- Assistive technology for amplification
- A sign language interpreter for oral directions or test items

Standardized Testing

The State Board of Education Administrative Rule 6A-6.014 Florida Administrative Code (FAC) refers to the State-Approved Assessments for Florida's adult students. To see the entire State Board of Education Administrative Rule, go to the following website:

<http://www.flrules.org/gateway/readFile.asp?sid=0&tid=4611397&type=1&file=6A-6.014.doc>. According to this rule, all students enrolled in courses whose learning gains are to be reported in the National Reporting System (NRS) and whose literacy completion points (LCPs) are reported to the state, must be tested using state-approved assessments. For additional information, also refer to *(Florida Department of Education, 2007: Technical Assistance Paper on Assessment Policies and Procedures in Adult General Education Programs)*.
<http://www.fldoe.org/workforce/pdf/TANAssessment2007.pdf>)

The following standardized tests are considered formal assessments and are approved for use in adult education programs in Florida. They fulfill several functions: (1) guide instruction, (2) show progress, and (3) are used in national and state reports.

- Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE)
- Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)
- CASAS Life Skills
- CASAS Life & Work
- Basic English Skills Test (BEST)
- BEST Plus

When administering these tests, adult educators must refer to the publisher's guidelines. These guidelines will include information about providing accommodations.

Alternative Assessments for Learners with Disabilities in Adult Education Programs

If an adult learner provides evidence of a documented disability, and the above-approved assessments, with accommodations, cannot accurately measure the learner's ability, one of the following tests may be used for placement in an adult general education program:

1. Brigance Employability Skills, 1995;
2. Brigance Life Skills, 1994;
3. Comprehensive Test of Adaptive Behaviors (CTAB), 1986;
4. Comprehensive Adult Life Assessment (CASAS) – STRETCH, 1996;
5. CASAS –Test for Special Populations, 1996; or
6. Kaufman Functional Adult Student Assessment System (K-FAST), 1994.

If an adult learner has a documented disability and these additional instruments still cannot accurately measure the learner's ability, documentation should be kept showing an attempt was made to assess the learner, and the result of this attempt should be kept in the learner's record for audit purposes. For more information, see: Rule 6A-6.014 FAC

<https://www.flrules.org/gateway/readFile.asp?sid=0&tid=4611397&type=1&File=6A-6.014.doc>

Basic Skills Exemption, Rule 6A-10.040, FAC, Revision

The Florida State Board of Education approved revisions to Rule 6A-10.040, Florida Administrative Code (FAC), Basic Skills Requirements for Postsecondary Vocational Certificate Education. For additional information, refer to <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/readFile.asp?sid=0&tid=1071479&type=1&File=6A-10.040.doc>. This rule requires that all students enrolled in postsecondary career and technical certificate education programs must complete an entry-level basic skills examination within six (6) weeks after admission into the program. Students who do not meet the basic skills requirement on the test are encouraged to participate in Vocational Preparatory Instruction (VPI) or Adult Basic Education (ABE) to improve their basic skills. Students are then re-tested to determine whether or not they have met the basic skills exit requirement. If a student has self-identified as having a disability, has provided documentation, and has met all other program requirements, but has not met all basic skill requirements for exit, that student may be exempted (*see Appendix G*). To view more examples of Basic Skills Exemption forms see *Appendix H*

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology enables adults with learning disabilities to compensate for specific deficits. It encompasses a wide range of tools and techniques. Examples of high tech tools include: a talking calculator, computer with word prediction software, or a variable speech control tape recorder for playing back audio taped material. When selecting assistive technology products, compatibility with the computer

operating systems and programs must be taken into consideration. Examples of low tech assistive technology tools include colored highlighters and pencil holders. For further information regarding types of assistive technology and local providers, access the Florida Alliance for Assistive Services and Technology (FAAST) website, <http://www.faast.org>.

Summary

Testing accommodations will change the conditions of administering an assessment or testing instrument, however it will not change the assessment instrument itself. Accommodations are made to allow test takers with disabilities to demonstrate their skills and abilities more accurately than if no accommodations were made. Accommodations must meet the needs of examinees without changing what the test is intended to measure.

It is recommended that local adult education programs develop a local policy that is written and communicated to all program staff. This policy should describe the local program steps to be followed for assessing learners with disabilities.

Following are some important points to remember when making decisions regarding accommodations. They are included in the document "Creating a Statewide Delivery Model for Adults with Learning Disabilities in Florida," <http://www.floridatechnet.org/LD/FINAL%20DRAFT%20-%20AUGUST%202005.pdf>:

- Not every student needs, or will benefit from, extended time. By far, extended time is the most widely used accommodation for students with learning disabilities
- Match the accommodation with the student's need. The guiding questions to ask are, "What changes need to be made to ensure that the student is on equal footing with students who do not have a disability?" and "Are the chosen accommodations linked directly to the student's learning needs?" Also keep in mind that the answers to these questions may differ during times of classroom instruction or assessment.
- To the extent possible and when appropriate, students should actively participate in the decision-making process. Accommodations should not be imposed upon students just because they are included on a transition IEP (TIEP), an AIEP, a Section 504 Accommodation Plan, or any other documentation.
- More is not always better when it comes to accommodations. Research suggests that "over accommodating" students is not helpful, and may actually depress their performance rather than improve it.
- Practice is the key to mastery. Accommodations are only helpful if students feel comfortable using them. Extended time or using alternate response formats, for example, are of little help if students don't know how to use them effectively.

Accommodations should be integrated into classroom practice before they are applied to assessment situations.

- Accommodations should facilitate accessibility to a test, and enable students to measure their knowledge, not change the skills that the test is designed to measure.

Additional Reference Information

For further information on Florida Department of Education policies and procedures regarding accommodations for learners with disabilities or other special needs, please contact the Florida Department of Education, Office of Workforce Education, Adult Education Programs and GED at (850) 245-9906. To obtain a copy of the document "*Creating a Statewide Delivery System for Adults with Learning Disabilities in Florida*" visit the website <http://www.floridatechnet.org/LD>

SECTION 4 - GENERAL EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (GED) TESTS

All candidates for the GED Tests should have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills under reasonable and appropriate test conditions. For some candidates, a disability may interfere with their ability to fully demonstrate what they know under standard testing conditions. Learning disabilities, for example, can affect the ability to store, process, and/or produce information. Learning disabilities can also affect the ability to read, write, speak, do math, and socialize.

Documentation of a Disability in GED Tests

GED Test accommodations are available for individuals with documented learning and other cognitive disabilities. Each request is considered and approved on an individual basis. While most requests for accommodations can be approved at the state level (State GED Administrator) requests for certain accommodations (e.g., use of computer) can only be approved by GEDTS. There is a range of accommodations available to GED candidates with disabilities and selection of the accommodation to be provided is based on the specific needs of the candidate.

The State GED Administrator is required to publicize the availability of test accommodations for qualified candidates with disabilities. The local GED Examiner is responsible for explaining the process of requesting accommodations, including documentation of disability, completion of GEDTS forms, submission of all required materials to the State GED Administrator, and notification to the Local Examiner and the candidate. Requesting accommodations can be a lengthy process. It is recommended that students make requests early and return forms to the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner) at least six (6) weeks before the scheduled testing date. Before forwarding the Request for Testing Accommodations form to the State GED Administrator for final review, the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner) must verify that a competent and qualified diagnostician has provided the necessary documentation and diagnoses. The form must be signed by the appropriate individuals. Incomplete or inconsistent applications will be returned. This will add time required for review. Accommodation Request forms can be accessed at the following website:

<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/ContentGroups/ProgramsandServices/GED/PO/Disabilities/ACC-1CompletingtheAccommodationRequestForm.pdf>

Verification of a GED Candidate's Disability

GED candidates with disabilities must self-identify and provide required documentation when requesting a GED Test accommodation. The documentation must then be verified by the State GED Administrator before it is considered. Approval of requests is based on: (1) documentation of a candidate's disability by a qualified professional whose credentials are appropriate to the disability; and, (2) allowable GED Test accommodations as determined by GEDTS. While both physical/chronic health disabilities and emotional/mental health disabilities may be verified through consultation with the candidate's medical doctor, learning and other cognitive disabilities must be diagnosed and verified by a licensed diagnostician. For persons with learning disabilities, GED Testing Service (GEDTS) will also accept as current, documentation that is more than five (5) years old if 1) the evaluation was conducted after the applicant's 17th birthday, and 2) a certifying professional provides a written statement on that professional's letterhead, stating why s/he believes there has been no change in the learning disability or need for the requested accommodation. However, older documentation will be considered if that is all the candidate can provide without undue burden or expense.

<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/ContentGroups/ProgramsandServices/GED/PO/Disabilities/ACC-4RequestforTestingAccommodationRev1-LD.pdf>

Anyone with a documented disability should contact their local GED Testing Center and request an accommodations form. Staff at the testing centers can advise what is needed to complete each of these forms. Return the completed form to the same location. Once the disability is documented and accommodations are approved, the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner) will arrange to conduct the testing using the approved accommodations. The GED candidate will not incur any additional charges for these accommodations. (*GED Examiners' Manual, 2005: Section 11*).

Accommodations Allowed by GED Testing Service (GEDTS)

According to the GED Examiners' Manual, (*GED Examiners' Manual, 2005: Section 11*) allowable accommodations for the GED Tests include:

- Audiocassette edition (with large print reference copy)
- Large print edition
- Braille edition, or use of a brailler
- Extended time
- Use of a scribe
- Use of graph paper
- Use of a talking calculator (for Part 2 of the Math test) (legally blind)
- Use of an abacus (legally blind)
- Supervised frequent breaks (certifying professional must specify the frequency and duration of the breaks required)
- Use of a private room
- One-on-one testing at a health facility or candidate's home
- Vision-enhancing technologies

- Use of video equipment
- Sign-language interpreter (A certified interpreter can be used to interpret test instructions and essay topic only, not the multiple-choice test questions, to examinees with hearing impairments. The interpreter may not be a relative or friend of the examinee.)

Anyone with a documented disability should contact their local GED Testing Center and request an accommodations form. Staff at the testing centers can advise what is needed to complete each of these forms. Return the completed form to the same location. Once the disability is documented and accommodations are approved, the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner) will arrange to conduct the testing using the approved accommodations. The GED candidate will not incur any additional charges for these accommodations. (*GED Examiners' Manual, 2005: Section 11*).

Examples of Allowable GED Testing Accommodations include:

Reading Disability (Dyslexia):

- Additional time, usually time and a half
- Double time, if condition is profound
- Large print edition
- Audiocassette edition

Written Language (Dysgraphia):

- Scribe to write the essay dictated by the candidate
- Scribe to fill in bubbles on answer sheet, if learning disabilities affect sense of space and direction

Mathematics Disability (Dyscalculia):

- Calculator if learning disabilities affect math calculation but not reasoning
- Graph paper

Note- If you believe that a GED candidate needs an accommodation that is not listed above, but is not explicitly prohibited, please contact your Local GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner).

Accommodations Not Allowed by GED Testing Service (GEDTS)

According to the GED Examiner's manual (*GED Examiner's Manual, 2005*), the following accommodations are **Not** allowed:

- Readers (Many tests have an audio-cassette format available).
- Computers – all requests for computer-based testing must be submitted to GEDTS for consideration. Requests for computer-based testing are rarely approved. Such requests are considered an "unreasonable accommodation"

because there is a risk that test items may be stored on the computer's hard drive. Should such violations occur, the cost for test security would be prohibitive. For this reason, computers may not be used to write essays or record test answers except as described in specialized situations. Such cases are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. In the past, computer use has been permitted for individuals with quadriplegia who were unable to move any parts of their bodies or speak, but who could communicate with the assistance of a computer controlled by eye contact. In some instances, GED candidates with visual impairments have written their essays using a braille connected to a computer that prints the essay in regular type. Other computer-controlled reading machines have also been allowed. These accommodations require approval from both the GED State Administrator and the GED Testing Service.

- Word-Processing and Spell-Checking Programs (may possibly be an option in certain exceptional circumstances with approval).
- Rulers, measuring devices, and scales may not be used because they may serve as an unauthorized aid on certain portions of the test (*2005 GED Examiner's Manual, Section 11*)

Accommodations Requiring Local Approval Only

The GED Chief Examiner may permit the use of certain adaptations and devices without prior approval from the GED Testing Service (GEDTS) including:

- **Colored Transparent Overlays**
These devices, which resemble tinted overhead transparencies, are widely used by persons with visual impairments and those with learning disabilities who have difficulty decoding written words and symbols.
- **Clear Transparent Overlays and a Highlighter**
The combination of clear (un-tinted) overlays and a highlighter can be used with the candidate who needs to use a highlighter while reading. The highlighting takes place on the clear overlay and protects the test booklet from becoming marked. All used overlays must be collected at the end of each testing session.
- **Temporary Adhesive (for example, Post-it® Notes) with Spatial Directions**
GED candidates may affix temporary "sticky" notes on the answer sheet to accommodate a disability affecting spatial orientation. For example, the candidate might flag the sheet for top, bottom, right, and left. For security reasons, the Official GED Testing Center must supply these adhesive notes to GED candidates.

- **Earplugs/Head Phones**
GED candidates may use earplugs/hearing protectors as an aid in concentration. Some large volume or busy testing centers routinely distribute disposable earplugs to all candidates.
- **Large-Print Test**
GED candidates may use the large print edition of the GED Tests under normal time limits, upon request to the GED Chief Examiner (GED) Examiner. It is recommended that each Official GED Testing Center have at least one large print test battery available.
- **Magnifying Device**
GED candidates may use their preferred type of magnifying device during test taking. If a GED candidate uses a magnifier during a standard testing session, the candidate may be seated in a way that precludes other candidates from seeing that candidate's test materials.
- **Priority Seating**
GED candidates may request to be seated near the front of the room in order to better hear instructions, or in some other location to avoid distractions.
- **Fluorescent Lighting**
GED candidates may request permission to wear hats or caps to limit the effects of fluorescent lighting.
- **One Test Per Day**
GED candidates may take one GED Test per day upon arrangement with the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner) at the designated local Official GED Testing Center.
- **Straightedge**
GED candidates may use a plain, unmarked straightedge made from any safe material as an aid in spatial orientation and reading. If the straightedge is an additional piece of scratch paper issued by the GED Chief Examiner (GED Examiner), it must be collected at the end of the testing session and must be destroyed along with any other scratch paper.
- **Miscellaneous**
Other allowed items include organizers/learning strategies written on scratch paper from memory, glasses with tinted lens, goggles, gloves, and allergy/dust masks or other chemical sensitivity masks.
- **Other Adaptive Devices**
GED candidates are allowed to use other adaptive devices such as pencil holder, muscle/skeletal aids such as wrist braces, and graph paper, so long as the device does not provide an unfair advantage to the test-taker.

Other Devices as Deemed Appropriate

The GED Testing Service allows all other devices without permission as long as they compensate for the disability, do not provide an unfair advantage, and do not compromise the validity or reliability of the GED Tests. (*GED Examiners' Manual, 2005: Section 11*)

GED Test Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):

1. Is there a cost to the student for using accommodations on the GED Tests?

No, there is never a cost to the student.

2. Do accommodations make the test easier?

No. They simply level the playing field. Accommodations allow persons with disabilities to demonstrate what they know in a different mode.

3. What can a teacher do to help a student with learning disabilities?

- Watch for students who are not progressing or who make uneven progress, who are frustrated, who just "don't get it," who try hard but just don't seem to be successful, who fidget, who can't concentrate or pay attention, who lose focus easily, who have a history of special education services, who get headaches when they read, who squint, who have poor coordination, who can't find their way around, who are continually late, disorganized, have difficulty using a pencil, and most importantly, help them get screened for learning disabilities.
- Be an advocate in the test accommodations process by helping the student request special education records, understand and follow the steps of the process, solve problems, keep all the records together, etc.
- Have the student practice using the requested accommodation in the classroom.
- Work on graphic organizers and strategy instruction with the student.
- Use a multi-sensory approach to teaching and learning.
- Indicate the effectiveness of the accommodation by giving the practice GED Test with and without accommodated modes to demonstrate the impact of the accommodation.
- Develop the student's ability to self-advocate for disability services by providing information designed to increase self-knowledge of the disability, the laws that protect individuals with disabilities, as well as individual rights and responsibilities.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate their understanding (e.g., through role-play).
- Provide information about assistive technology and how both low-tech (pencil-holders) and high tech (computers and software programs such as text-to-speech) can assist people with disabilities.
- Increase knowledge about how learning disabilities can interfere with learning and testing. (*GED Examiners' Manual, 2005: Section 11*)

SUMMARY

Studies have consistently shown that for adults with disabilities, post-secondary education and training is the great equalizer. It is the factor that most often helps to “level the playing field” for these individuals as they enter the competitive job market.

However, the successful acquisition of postsecondary education and training can be a long, difficult road for many adult students with learning disabilities. Although federal and state statutes protect them from discrimination, there are still many barriers to overcome. Adult students must be willing to step forward, disclose their disability, and advocate for themselves. For many adults with learning disabilities these are huge steps. As adult educators it is our responsibility to be active members of these students’ support systems. We need to reach out and provide the assistance they need in an effort to help them achieve their goals. Psychologists, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, instructors, guidance counselors and other professionals are also helpful in providing support to potential GED candidates with disabilities.

Appropriate accommodations, both in the classrooms and on tests, are a key component to students’ success. Accommodations are changes made to the way students’ access information and demonstrate performance. They may also serve to remove or lessen barriers to students’ performance, however they do not change the instrument itself. Even very simple accommodations can mean the difference between success and failure for adult students with learning disabilities. Experiencing success in postsecondary education can be life changing for these students.

This technical assistance paper provides local adult education administrators and instructors guidance in the process of providing appropriate accommodations for adults with learning disabilities. It contains information on self-identification, documentation of a disability, appropriate accommodations, and 504 Plans. The provision of appropriate accommodations for adult students with learning disabilities is crucial to their success in postsecondary education. Local program providers can acknowledge the importance of accommodations for **adult** students with learning disabilities by creating and adopting a policy that addresses their individual needs.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Rights Afforded by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

Adults with disabilities enrolled in Career, Technical and Adult/Community Education programs have the right to:

1. Request accommodations to take part in and receive benefits from programs, services, and activities without discrimination because of your disabling condition.
2. Have the school district advise you of your rights under federal law.
3. Receive services and be educated in facilities that are comparable to those provided to non-disabled students.
4. Examine all relevant records relating to decisions regarding your accommodations.
5. File a grievance. Procedures for filing a grievance are maintained by the school administrator.
6. Receive a copy of your rights as identified herein.

The person responsible for assuring that the district complies with Section 504/ADA is the Director of Equal Educational Opportunities.

(Items 1-5: *34 CFR Subpart A Section 104.1*; Item 6: *28 CFR Subpart E Section 35.163(a)*.)

APPENDIX B

Documentation Guidelines Used in the Development of Section 504 Plans for Adults with Learning Disabilities

The following criterion may be used to document a learning disability for the purposes of creating a Section 504 plan and providing accommodations for basic skills testing and instruction. It is recommended that the documentation be current, that is, within five years and on an adult measure whenever possible. Current documentation assures that decisions made on testing and instructional accommodations address the student's current educational/functional needs. However, older documentation may serve as a basis for further discussion to determine an individual's need for accommodations.

Examples of documentation include:

- The most recent transitional or educational plan from public/private schools and agencies
- Individualized plan of employment (IPE) from Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Letters of certification from service agencies
- Documentation obtained from the K-12 data screen for exceptional students
- Written medical or psychological verification by appropriate professionals if agency documentation is unavailable.

The certifying professional's statement will be appropriate in determining eligibility for the provision of reasonable accommodations pursuant to Section 504 and ADA if:

1. The professional conducting the assessment is licensed and qualified to diagnose learning disabilities in compliance with state licensure policies. Licensure/Certificate information, area of specialization, and employment is included in the psychological report.
2. The specific diagnosis of the learning disability is clearly stated and explained (not vague, non-specific, or inconclusive).
3. Current symptoms meeting diagnosis are addressed.
4. The diagnostic report includes anticipated effects of the functional limitations within the academic/vocational setting.
5. The diagnostic report includes suggested recommendation(s) for accommodations(s) or auxiliary aid(s) for the adult and includes information about the conditions under which accommodations and auxiliary aids might be used.

Current requirements for GED test will take precedence over basic documentation guidelines when a student with a learning disability is applying for GED testing accommodations. In this case, the diagnostic report must specify the degree of current functional loss and/or the functional limitations of the disability and must not be more than five years old. Documentation that is older than five years will be

accepted if "1) the evaluation was conducted after the applicants 17th birthday, and 2) a certifying professional provides a written statement on that professional's letterhead, stating why s/he believes there has been no change in the learning disability or need for the requested accommodation. However, older documentation will be considered if that is all the candidate can provide without undue burden or expense." (*GED Request for Testing Accommodations-Learning and Other Cognitive Disabilities form*).

<http://www.acenet.edu/Content/ContentGroups/ProgramsandServices/GED/PO/Disabilities/ACC-4RequestforTestingAccommodationRev1-LD.pdf>).

APPENDIX C

TEN STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL SELF-ADVOCACY

1. Accept your disability
2. Admit your disability to others
3. Understand your learning style
4. Realize how "other issues" might interfere with your self-advocacy
5. Anticipate your needs
6. Know your rights and responsibilities
7. Be aware of the accommodations that are needed
8. Be willing to compromise
9. Know where to go for support
10. Plan for the future

(Crouse, 2001. *LD-Self Advocacy Manual: Uncovering the Mysteries of Your Learning Disability*. http://www.ldinfo.com/self_advocacy_manual.htm)

RELATED WEBSITES

ACE of Florida - <http://www.aceofflorida.org/ged>

Accommodating Students with Disabilities in the Classroom

<http://das.kucrl.org/iam/inclass.html#9>

Florida Alliance for Assistive Technology and Services - <http://faast.org>

Florida Technet - <http://floridatechnet.org>

LD Online - <http://www.ldonline.org>

National Institute for Literacy - <http://www.nifl.gov>

Schwab Learning - <http://www.schwablearning.org>