

Accommodations and Modifications



What Parents Need to Know

Revised 2003

**Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
Florida Department of Education**

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.

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Learning Systems Institute
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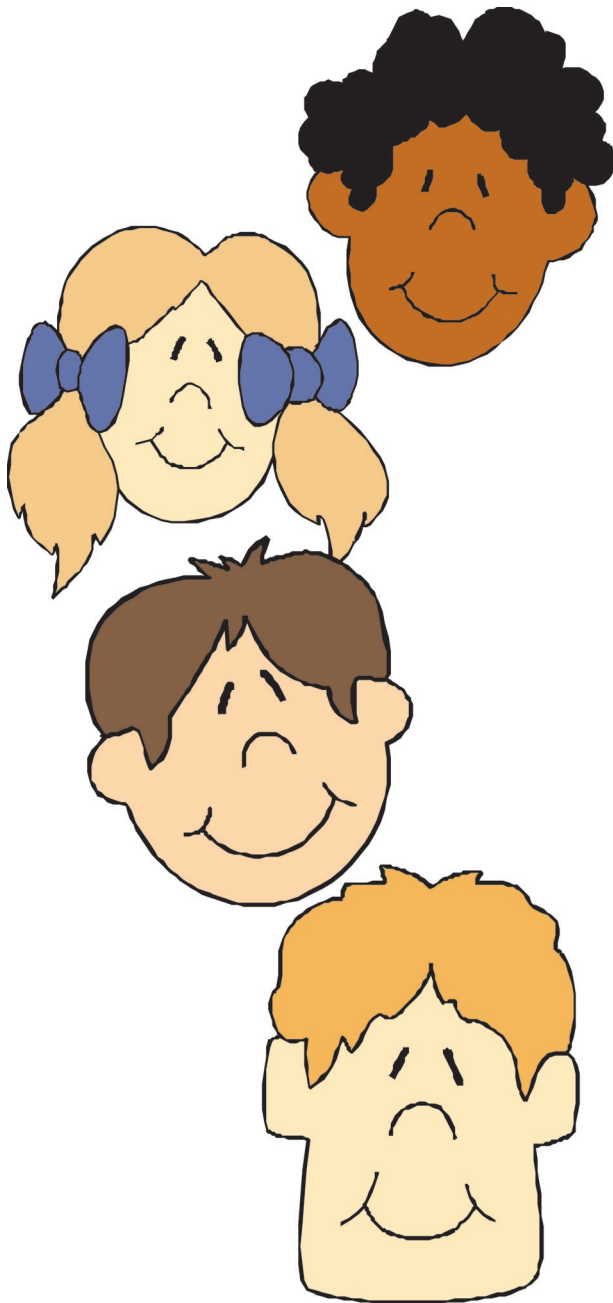
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Getting Started



As a parent of a child with a disability, you are involved in making decisions about special education services for your child. This book is written to help you understand two important features of special education services, accommodations and modifications.

Simply stated, *accommodations* are changes to the way your child is expected to learn or how he or she is tested. *Modifications* are changes to what your child is expected to learn.

In this book you'll learn more about these two words. You'll see many examples of accommodations and modifications. You'll also read about how decisions are made for your child and written on the individual educational plan (IEP) for your child. Finally, you'll learn about the importance of continuous planning and collaboration to prepare your child for success in school and later as an adult.

What are Accommodations and Modifications?

Accommodations and modifications are an important part of planning the educational program for your child. Many students with a disability may only need small changes to the way they are taught and tested. Then they can participate successfully in regular classes.

Accommodations involve many kinds of techniques and support systems. Accommodations help students work around limitations related to their disability. Students who are blind may need to use braille textbooks or books-on-tape. Students who use wheelchairs may need a ramp or elevator to move independently in the school building. Students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may need a sign language interpreter.

Accommodations are really “whatever it takes” to make sure that students with a disability can participate as fully as possible in the general curriculum and ultimately earn a high school diploma. Accommodations can be provided for

- instructional methods and materials
- assignments and assessments
- learning environment
- time demands and scheduling
- special communication systems



*Accommodations
are made to the
WAY students
learn and **HOW**
they are tested.*

Goals for learning in school do not have to change when accommodations are used. Students with a disability can be challenged to meet the same requirements as students without disabilities. Most can take the same tests, pass the same kinds of courses, and earn the same high grades to graduate with a standard diploma.

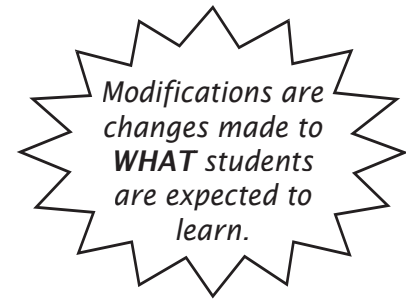
Students with disabilities who are seniors may be eligible for an FCAT waiver if they are working toward a 4 year, 24 credit standard diploma. The student must have attempted the grade 10 FCAT at least twice, once in the tenth grade and once in the eleventh grade. The student must also have been provided remediation to help him or her learn the skills assessed by the FCAT. The student must meet all other graduation requirements including the required credits and grade point average (2.0).

The IEP team must decide whether or not the FCAT accurately measures the student's ability and whether the student has mastered the Sunshine State Standards assessed on the FCAT.

Not all students with a disability are able to meet all of the requirements of the regular school program. Some students may not be able to work on grade level or pass the required courses for graduation. Some students may need a different curriculum to meet their priority educational needs. Generally, these students will be working for a special diploma.

The IEP team decides if curriculum modifications are needed for a student with a disability. Modifications may include

- completion of part of the program or some of the course requirements
- curriculum expectations below grade level
- alternate curriculum goals
- alternate assessments



Why Can We Use Them?

Federal and state laws and regulations require schools to provide accommodations and modifications to make sure that students with a disability have access to an appropriate education program.

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997) requires that students with a disability have the opportunity to be involved and make progress in the general curriculum.
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that accommodations be provided to students with a disability, even if they don't have an IEP.
- The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination against any people with disabilities.
- Florida's state and district laws and regulations support the federal laws. State Board of Education Rule 6A-6.0312, FAC, "Course Modifications;" Rule 6A-1.0943, FAC, "Statewide Assessment for Students with Disabilities;" Rule 6A-1.09431, FAC, "Procedures for Exemption from Graduation Test Requirements;" and Section 1008.43(11)(a,b), Florida Statutes, "General requirements for high school graduation" describe allowable accommodations and modifications.

Who Is Eligible?

Students who have been evaluated and placed into programs for exceptional student education (ESE) are eligible for accommodations and modifications. Professionals, family members, and the student work together on the IEP team to develop an individual educational plan (IEP). The IEP team looks at the student's present level of performance and educational needs and decides what kinds of accommodations and modifications are needed. You and your child are important members of the IEP team.

Students with physical or mental disabilities who are not eligible for ESE programs may also need accommodations. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that individuals with disabilities have a right to accommodations in school or at work. Your school district develops "504 plans" that identify the accommodations needed for individual students.

How Are IEP Decisions Made?

The IEP team discusses what accommodations are necessary for your child to be successful in school. The following questions may be asked:

- *Does your child have the basic knowledge and skills that are needed for this grade level or course?*
- *How independent is your child in completing assignments?*
- *Does your child learn and work as fast as do other students in the class?*
- *Can your child be expected to complete the tests and assignments that are generally used in class?*
- *Can your child use the same books and instructional resources as do other students?*
- *What kinds of strategies are needed to help your child behave in class?*
- *What accommodations will be needed in the school or classroom environment?*
- *Will teachers need additional support to work with your child?*



Generally, the IEP team recommends that your child have the same kinds of accommodations for both instruction and assessment. For example, your child may need more time to complete classroom assignments. If so, he or she should also have more time for classroom tests and the state or district testing program.

When decisions about accommodations are being made, it is very important that everyone have a chance to give input. This includes the ESE staff, the basic or vocational teachers who will provide the accommodations, and you, the parents. Don't forget to ask your child. If your child doesn't want to use a particular accommodation, other options may be considered.

The accommodations and modifications needed by your child are written on his or her IEP. From time to time you or teachers may find that additional accommodations are needed for specific assignments or activities. Teachers may provide additional accommodations whenever they are needed.

It's important to remember that your child will continue to learn and develop, even though it may be at a slower pace than most students. With continued instruction on the essential skills for learning such as reading and writing, the need for certain kinds of accommodations should lessen over time. Many accommodations will be temporary. You can help your child become less and less dependent on the accommodations and more reliant on his or her own abilities.



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More about Accommodations

To decide which accommodations are needed, you should first think about the learning problems your child is likely to experience in the classroom. Teachers may need to make changes in the way they teach, in the materials that your child uses, or in the classroom environment. Your child may need to get additional help from the teacher's aide or assistant. He or she may also need to use assistive technology. Assistive technology encompasses a wide range of tools and techniques. Some low-tech tools include things like pencil grips, study guides, or highlighted materials. High-tech tools include electronic equipment such as a talking calculator or specially designed word processing software. School districts use an evaluation process to identify what kinds of assistive technology are needed for a student. This chapter provides examples of accommodations for a variety of learning problems, including examples of assistive technology.



Instructional Methods and Materials

Many students with a disability experience problems in the classroom because they have difficulty following the instructional methods and using the textbooks and other types of learning materials. Accommodations can help students work around these problems.

Accommodations for Reading

The ability to read is one of the keys to academic success. Many students with a disability do not have sufficient skills to read on grade level. They may still be learning basic phonics and word-identification skills. They may be learning how to use strategies to help them understand written words, phrases, and sentences. Some textbooks and worksheets present additional challenges to students because they are not clear or well organized.

Learning Problem

Students have difficulty finding the main ideas or knowing what is important to remember in the book they are reading.



Students can understand information when they listen to it, but cannot read materials required for class assignments.

Students who are blind or visually impaired may require specially prepared materials or equipment to obtain information for class.

Accommodation

- ✓ Highlight important ideas and tell students to read them first.
- ✓ Give students a study guide to follow when they must read by themselves.
- ✓ Let students use a book that is written on a lower grade level. This may help students pay more attention to the main ideas.
- ✓ Provide a tape-recorded version of the material.
- ✓ Use a videotape or movie that presents the same information.
- ✓ Use assistive technology to transfer printed words to speech.
- ✓ Have a learning buddy read aloud textbooks or other printed material.
- ✓ Provide books-on-tape or large-print versions of texts.
- ✓ Provide books and other instructional materials in braille or embossed format.
- ✓ Provide special equipment such as an optical enhancer or magnifier.

Accommodations for Lectures and Discussions

Some students with a disability have difficulty maintaining attention, following ideas, and interpreting information that is presented orally. They may need accommodations for instruction that involves lectures and discussions.

Learning Problem

Students have difficulty figuring out what they are supposed to learn from a lecture or discussion.

Accommodation

- ✓ Use visual aids, such as chalkboard, overhead, or charts.
- ✓ Provide an overview of the content at the beginning of the lesson. Introduce new vocabulary before the lesson.
- ✓ Give students a summary of important information from the lecture with a list of questions to be answered.

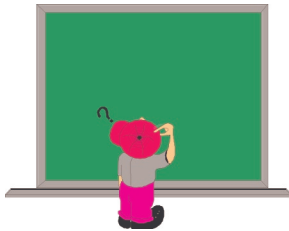
Learning Problem

Students have trouble following the ideas during the lecture or discussion.

Accommodation

- ✓ Keep students involved by encouraging them to ask questions or by breaking up the lecture with small group activities or discussion.
- ✓ Identify the main steps or key components of the information.
- ✓ Write important ideas on the board. Use colored chalk or markers for emphasis.
- ✓ Give students copies of lecture notes.
- ✓ Let students use a tape recorder to record lectures and class discussions.
- ✓ Repeat, use other words, and summarize all important points. This is particularly important at the end of the lecture or discussion.
- ✓ Provide help for notetaking, such as giving students a copy of overheads, an outline of the lecture, or a diagram.

Students have difficulty taking notes and remembering the ideas.



Students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing may need assistance.

- ✓ Use pictures, written words, charts, or diagrams to reinforce what is presented orally. Repeat as often as necessary.
- ✓ Provide a sign language interpreter or notetaker.

Accommodations for Mathematics

Students with a disability may have problems learning mathematical concepts and processes. Some have poor arithmetic skills and continue to rely on childish techniques, like counting on their fingers. Some students have a great deal of difficulty remembering basic facts.

Learning Problem

Students have difficulty understanding math concepts and solving problems.

Accommodation

- ✓ Let students use concrete materials and objects to learn about mathematical concepts.
- ✓ Color-code or highlight key words in math word problems.
- ✓ Let students use a chart to plan ways to solve math problems.
- ✓ Let students use a calculator or chart of basic facts for computation.

Assignments and Assessments

Frequently, students with a disability need accommodations for specific kinds of classroom assignments and assessment. Generally, students need the same kind of accommodation for *both* assignments and assessments. If the student needs to use a word processor to complete a written assignment, he or she will also need it for a written test.

Accommodations for Writing

Problems with written assignments and assessments may be related to difficulties with handwriting. They may also be the result of expressive language disabilities such as difficulties with finding words, forming sentences, organizing thoughts, and using standard forms of grammar and spelling.

Learning Problem

Students have trouble with fine motor control and handwriting.

Accommodation

- ✓ Let students write directly in the workbook or on a copy of the workbook page.
 - ✓ Let students use a word processor or typewriter.
 - ✓ Let students dictate their work to a teaching assistant or classmate who will write it down.
 - ✓ Let students use adaptive devices: pencil grips or special pen or pencil holders, erasable pens, or special paper with raised or color-coded lines.
-
- Students have difficulty expressing their ideas.
- ✓ Let students use a thesaurus to find words to write or say.
 - ✓ Let students use special word processing software that anticipates what students are trying to write.
 - ✓ Let students use a spelling dictionary or electronic spelling aid.
 - ✓ Grade content and mechanics separately in written assignments. Give students a chance to correct spelling and grammar errors.



Accommodations for Following Instructions

Teachers generally give directions by telling, writing, or showing students what they are supposed to do. Students with a disability may have difficulty following directions because they have trouble paying attention or remembering. They may also have trouble understanding what the directions are asking them to do.

Learning Problem

Students have trouble remembering what to do.

Accommodation

- ✓ Have students say the directions in their own words or show the teacher what they are to do.
- ✓ Teach students how to use an assignment notebook or personal planner to keep track of their assignments and tests.

Students have trouble understanding the directions.

- ✓ Give step-by-step instructions. Outline the steps in writing or use pictures.
- ✓ Complete sample problems or tasks to show students what they are to do.
- ✓ Combine spoken directions with pictures, words, or diagrams.

Accommodations for Completing Assignments

Some students with a disability have trouble completing assignments. This may be because they work very slowly and run out of time. Some students may not remember to get the resources and materials they will need to complete all of their assignments.

Learning Problem

Students have trouble keeping track of their assignments.

Accommodation

- ✓ Break long assignments into parts. Set a separate due date for each part.
- ✓ Have students mark assignments on a calendar.

Students work slower than classmates.

- ✓ Reduce the total amount of work. Be sure to select the tasks or items that are needed to accomplish all of the learning objectives.
- ✓ Let students use resources and instructional materials outside of class.
- ✓ Give partial credit for late assignments or incomplete work until students are able to complete their work on time.



Accommodations for Organization

Students who have trouble attending to more than one thing at a time often have problems with complex assignments. Students who are easily distracted may forget the instructions or get things confused. Some instructional materials are not clear. Materials with too many details can be very confusing to students.

Keeping track of classroom materials also presents problems to many students. They don't know how to store materials so they can easily find them. Lockers or desks are often cluttered with things that are not really needed at school.

Learning Problem

Students are confused by complex instructions and materials.

Students have difficulty keeping their materials and belongings organized.



Accommodation

- ✓ Use color-coding to help students identify different kinds of tasks or materials.
- ✓ Use uncluttered tests and worksheets. Arrange problems or work so that it is easy to know where to start and how to proceed.
- ✓ Let students use a special folder or binder to keep materials organized. Use dividers or folders to keep subjects organized and use a different color for each unit or subject.
- ✓ Give students a checklist of materials needed for each class. The checklist can be kept in their locker or binder.

Accommodations for Taking Tests

In general, students with a disability will need the same types of accommodations for both classroom tests and standardized tests, if they are allowed. Accommodations that are used with standardized tests such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) must be consistent with what is stated in the test manual or with what has been approved by the State Board of Education. Accommodations provide the opportunity for students with a disability to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills without being unfairly tested.

The five major categories of accommodations allowed for the FCAT and standardized test are presentation, responding, scheduling, setting, and assistive technology. Here are some examples for each category.

Presentation

Most assessments are presented in the form of paper and pencil tasks. The questions or problems are presented in writing or with graphics. The reading level and complexity of the content reflects what has been taught. Other types of assessments involve the observation of students performing a particular task or skill.

Learning Problem

Accommodation

Students can't read well enough or need a different form of the test.

- ✓ Read the test items aloud to students, unless it is a test of reading skills.
- ✓ Use text-to-speech technology to communicate directions or test items for items other than reading tests.
- ✓ Let the student read the test items to him- or herself while working on the assessment.
- ✓ Provide copies of tests in braille or in large print formats.

Students need assistance in focusing on the test.

- ✓ Let the student use assistive technology for magnification or amplification.
- ✓ Let the student use a pointer, template, blank card, or positioning tool to enhance visual attention on the test materials.
- ✓ Use blank colored transparencies or overlays to enhance visual perception.
- ✓ Provide white noise (sound machines) and headphones to reduce auditory distractions.

Students need help with directions.

- ✓ Use symbols on the test or answer form that help the student follow directions, such as an arrow or stop sign.
- ✓ Provide a sign language interpreter for oral directions.
- ✓ Read the test directions and writing prompt aloud.
- ✓ Reread or explain the directions of the test if the student needs it.
- ✓ Underline or highlight important words in the directions or test items.

Learning Problem

Students are unsure about what to do.

Accommodation

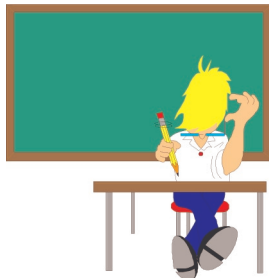
- ✓ Give verbal encouragement ("keep working, answer every question") without giving clues to correct or incorrect answers.
- ✓ Give extra examples for practice to make sure the student knows what to do.

Some accommodations for presentation format are not permitted on the FCAT because they change what is being tested. For example, test items can not be read aloud to the student if the purpose of the test is to measure reading skills. *The following accommodations may be used for classroom assessments, but are not allowed on the FCAT.*

Students have difficulty shifting from one type of task to another.

- ✓ Group questions so that similar kinds of items are together. Put the easiest questions first.

Students need assistance in recalling information.



- ✓ Block matching questions into small groups of four or five items.
- ✓ Provide a list of words to use for fill-in-the-blank or essay questions.
- ✓ Let the student take an open book test, unless memorization is required.
- ✓ Eliminate one of the choices in multiple-choice items.
- ✓ Require fewer questions, but select ones that measure all required content.

Response

Students respond to test questions in different way including writing an answer, selecting one of the responses to multiple-choice questions, or solving a problem and explaining the solution. Answer sheets may require students to bubble in the correct circle for each question. Accommodations allowed on the FCAT may include:

Learning Problem

Students have difficulty answering the test questions with their own handwriting.

Accommodation

- ✓ Let the student use increased space for answering test questions.
- ✓ Let the student respond orally, dictate answers to an aide or test proctor, or tape record answers.
- ✓ Let the student sign responses to an interpreter.

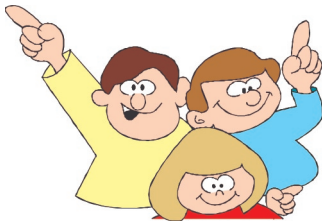
Learning Problem	Accommodation
Students have difficulty using handwriting to answer the questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Let the student use a typewriter or word processor to write answers to test items. Remember that students can't use the spell check or grammar check when they are taking the FCAT. ✓ Let the student write on the test booklet instead of writing on an answer sheet. ✓ Let the student braille responses on a separate paper. ✓ Let the student use speech-to-text technology to record responses.
Students have difficulty maintaining effort and attention on tests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Let the student use diagrams or charts and outlines to plan for open-ended or essay questions. ✓ Monitor the student's answer sheet to determine if the student is recording their responses in the correct space. ✓ Give partial credit for answers to extended response questions that are partially correct. The FCAT rubrics for extended response questions give some credit for partially correct answers.
<p>Some accommodations for responding are not permitted on the FCAT because they change what is being tested. <i>The following accommodations may be used for classroom assessments, but are not allowed on the FCAT.</i></p>	
Students have difficulty performing on tests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide pre-designed webs, diagrams or charts and outlines for students to use to plan for open-ended or essay questions. ✓ Let the student provide alternate demonstrations of knowledge and skills using demonstrations, role playing, or interviewing. ✓ Let the student use references such as a dictionary, thesaurus, or almanac. ✓ Let the student use manipulatives to check or complete computations. ✓ Let the student retake the test and give credit for improvement. Remember, the FCAT only allows retakes for the grade 10 tests.

Schedule

Some students may need to have extra time to complete the test. Students who use certain kinds of assistive technology or who work very slowly may need to have the schedule changed for the test.

Learning Problem

Students work very slowly or can't work for long periods of time.



Accommodation

- ✓ Let students have additional time to complete tests.
- ✓ Break tests into small sections and let students take them over a period of days, if needed.
- ✓ Let the student take short breaks during the test period.
- ✓ Let the student take the test at a certain time of day. Some students take medications or have physical conditions that may affect their attention and alertness.

Some accommodations for schedules are not permitted on the FCAT because they change what is being tested. *The following accommodations may be used for classroom assessments, but are not allowed on the FCAT.*

- ✓ Require fewer questions. Be sure that all required content and skills are tested.
- ✓ Let the student go back over questions answered on a previous day and make corrections.

Setting

Some students may need a special setting to take the test. Students who are easily distracted may do better when taking the test alone or in a small group. Other students need special accommodations because of their sensory or physical impairments.

Learning Problem

Students can't take tests in a large group because they are easily distracted.

Students have special needs based on sensory or physical impairments.

Accommodation

- ✓ Give the test to the student alone or in a small group.
- ✓ Let the student use a study enclosure to take the test.
- ✓ Let the student take the test in another room where there are no distractions.
- ✓ Let the student use needed adaptive furniture or equipment.

Assistive Technology

Students who use assistive technology should be able to use it when they are taking tests. It's important to consider whether or not the use of the technology would change what is actually being assessed. For example technology that translates written words to spoken words (text to speech) could not be used by a student on a test of reading skills. Other assistive technology typically used by the student in classroom instruction can be used for assessments provided the purpose of the testing is not violated. It is also important to make sure that the answers on the test reflect the independent work of the student.

Learning Problem

Students use assistive technology to acquire information or to express what they have learned.

Accommodation

- ✓ Let the student use an adaptive calculator to solve math problems. Remember that the FCAT only allows calculators in grades 7-10.
- ✓ Let the student use technology for writing essays or long answers or explanations to test questions. For example a word processor, digital voice recorder, or cassette tape recorder could be used by students to record their answers.

Unique Accommodations

Some students may need unusual accommodations for the FCAT that are not already identified by the Department of Education. Unique accommodations usually involve changes to existing test materials. A student may use a unique accommodation with the prior approval of the Commissioner of Education. The exceptional student education program in your school district can help with the request for approval. Some examples of unique accommodations include:

- ✓ increased space between test items
- ✓ fewer items on a page
- ✓ tabbed or modified pages for easy turning
- ✓ papers secured to the work area.

Learning Environment

Accommodations may also involve changes to the environment of the school or classroom. Changes to the learning environment may include adaptations to the physical setting of the school or classroom. They may also change the way students are grouped for instruction. Some students may need special techniques to help them control their own behavior. In some cases, an off-campus location may be needed. When an off-campus site is selected, it is important that students have activities with people who do not have disabilities.

Accommodations to the Physical Environment

An accessible or barrier-free environment is necessary to make sure that students with a disability can get around in the school or classroom. Many buildings are already equipped with nonslip surfaces, guide rails, ramps, elevators, and automatic doors for students who have difficulty with mobility. Accessibility standards are included in the Americans with Disabilities Act. The accessibility standards describe requirements for components such as parking, entries into buildings and rooms, alarms, telephones, drinking fountains, and restrooms.



If your child needs these types of accommodations and they are not readily available in your school, you may need to speak up. Talk about your child's needs with teachers and staff. Have a meeting with the school administrator to see what can be done. You may also contact district staff for information and assistance.

Accommodations for Behavior Management

Changes to the learning environment may be needed to help some students manage their own behavior. Learning the rules of conduct and how to follow them is sometimes as hard as learning how to solve a complex problem in science or mathematics. Special behavioral plans or counseling services might be needed for some students with a disability.

Learning Problem

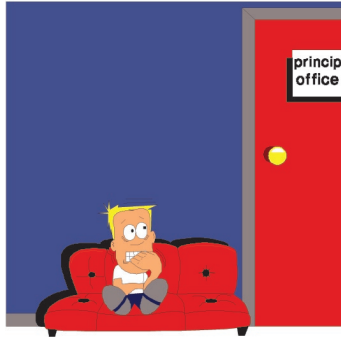
Students can't control their own behavior.

Accommodation

- ✓ Let students use a study enclosure to complete independent work.
- ✓ Give students work that can be completed in short periods of time.
- ✓ Let students use a timer to monitor how much longer they have to work.

Learning Problem

Students need some structure to help control their own behavior.



Students cannot control their own behavior without personal attention and support from school personnel.

Accommodation

- ✓ Reinforce positive behaviors for following class rules.
- ✓ Make a list of consequences for breaking rules. Make sure that students know what the rules and consequences are.
- ✓ Provide activities for students during free time.
- ✓ Use prompts and follow routines to get ready to start a lesson, to change classes or go to lunch, or to travel to another area in the school.
- ✓ Let students sit next to an aide, volunteer, or trained classmate who can help them pay attention.
- ✓ Identify a study buddy who can help students when the teacher is busy. Make sure the buddy knows how to work effectively with the students.
- ✓ Provide instruction individually or in small groups.

Time Demands and Scheduling

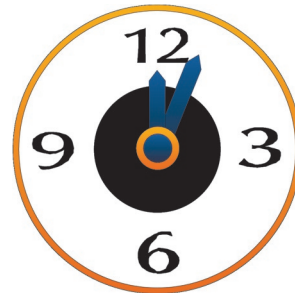
Your child may work or learn at a slower pace than his or her classmates. Some students do better when they are not under the pressure of a strict schedule. Accommodations can be made to time demands or requirements for assignments and assessments, as well as for whole programs of study.

In some cases the amount of required practice can be reduced. If the assignment has many similar items, a student may be asked to do every other one. In high school, the students may be allowed to receive an “incomplete” as a grade for a course. Then they can complete the course the following semester or during summer school.

Assigning students to appropriate classes is especially important in middle and high school programs. ESE teachers may need to work with school administrators to be sure the class schedules can accommodate any special needs of students with a disability.

Here are some additional techniques related to adjusting time demands and schedules.

- ✓ Use flexible scheduling that allows students more time to complete a course. Sometimes summer school can be used for this purpose.
- ✓ Allow additional time for classwork and tests.
- ✓ Give assignments ahead of time, so students can get started early.
- ✓ Give students a clear schedule with checkpoints along the way.



Special Communication Systems

Some students with a disability use specialized communication systems. These systems may involve different methods of communication. One system used by many students who are deaf or hard of hearing is total communication. This involves sign language, finger spelling, and lip reading. Other students may need to use augmentative communication systems such as a communication board or a presented symbol system.

If your child requires a specialized communication system, it will be important for you and the teachers to learn about it. You and the teachers may need to get training so you can easily communicate with your child.

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More about Modifications

Modifications to the expectations of the curriculum may be necessary if your child can't work on the same grade level as his or her classmates. The IEP team can also use curriculum modifications to address any other educational needs of your child. For most students with a disability, curriculum modifications should be considered only after all types of accommodations have been exhausted.

In Florida, the Sunshine State Standards set high expectations for curriculum used with students. For each standard, benchmarks explain what students need to know at four stages: from prekindergarten to grade 2, and from grades 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12. The benchmarks describe major milestones that students should reach on their way to meeting the standards. In addition, grade level expectations for achievement have been developed for language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies for kindergarten through grade 8. The standards, benchmarks, and grade level expectations tell teachers what their students should be expected to learn in the general curriculum. The Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma set high expectations for students with a disability who need curriculum modifications.

When thinking about modifications, the IEP team must consider possible long-range impacts of lowering the expectations. Students with a disability who are not challenged to reach the same level of achievement as their nondisabled classmates in elementary or middle school may find that they are not ready for a program that leads to a standard diploma in high school. Requirements for a standard diploma include passing a set of regular education courses, having a "C" average, and passing the state's graduation test.

If your child requires major modifications in the expectations or content of the curriculum, a special diploma may be a good choice. For a special diploma, your local school district specifies the required courses. Students must master the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma and may use modified courses to meet special diploma requirements.



This section provides more information about the kinds of modifications that can be provided for a student with a disability.

Partial Completion of Requirements

If the grade level expectations or course requirements are not realistic for your child, the IEP team may modify them. In addressing your child's educational needs, the IEP team will need to consider which curriculum requirements are most important. For example, your child may be able to gain some understanding of the ideas and concepts in a subject, even if he or she is unable to learn large numbers of scientific facts or carry out complex sets of procedures independently.

In high school, academic or basic education course requirements may not be modified for students with a disability unless the course will be used as an elective. If the student is not working toward a standard diploma and the IEP team determines that the student will benefit from participating in the regular course, then requirements may be modified. Remember that modified courses will not meet all of the graduation requirements for a standard diploma.



Career and technical education (vocational) programs and courses are different. Students may use modified career and technical education courses for certain requirements of a standard diploma. The courses may be modified to prepare the student for specific kinds of jobs. Modified Occupational Completion Points (MOCPs) are selected from a job preparatory program. The MOCPs are identified through the IEP process and specified on the student's transition IEP. For example, a student may use MOCPs to obtain training to be a carpenter's assistant. The overall aim of using MOCPs is to maximize students' opportunities to participate in job preparatory programs and increase their likelihood of success in the world of work.

Curriculum Expectations Below Age or Grade Level

In any classroom, students are learning at different rates. Some students may be achieving right on grade level, while others may be above or below. Many students with a disability are making progress in the Sunshine State Standards for academic subject areas, but are not learning at the same rate as their classmates. Your child may be working on basic skills that are substantially below grade level. The IEP should reflect whether it is appropriate for your child to be working on standards and benchmarks that are substantially below age or grade level.

Alternate Curriculum Goals

For some students with a disability, the IEP team may decide that the student's priority educational needs are different from the general curriculum specified in the Sunshine State Standards for the academic subject areas. For example, a student with moderate disabilities may need to learn how to care for personal needs and develop interpersonal communication skills. The student's annual goals would reflect the student's needs in personal care, socialization, and interpersonal communication, and not the academics of the regular school program.

Alternate Assessments

If your child requires modified standards or an alternate curriculum, the IEP team may decide that it is not appropriate for him or her to participate in the state and district assessments. The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) includes tests in reading, mathematics, writing, and science. It is important to make the decision about taking the FCAT very carefully, especially in elementary school. If you want your child to be prepared to earn a standard diploma in high school, then he or she should participate in the state testing program at all required grade levels. If your child doesn't take the FCAT, the alternate assessment must be identified on the IEP.

The state has established guidelines to help the IEP team decide whether or not the student should participate in the state or district assessment program. If your child meets the following criteria, then an alternate assessment may be the best choice.

- The student's low cognitive ability prevents him or her from completing the required courses and achieving the Sunshine State Standards even with accommodations.
- The student requires extensive direct instruction to learn how to apply and transfer skills needed for domestic, community living, leisure, and vocational activities.

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Making It Happen

Decisions about your child's need for accommodations and modifications are made and documented through the IEP process. Once you have the IEP, you will want to make sure that these services are provided for your child. You will also want to make sure that the accommodations and modifications are making a difference.

Working Together

Collaboration is a must when providing accommodations and modifications for your child. Responsibility for your child's educational program rests with many people. Some schools have special education teachers who provide consultation services. Other schools schedule common planning periods so teachers can work together. Support from school staff in guidance, school health, vision, speech-language, or adaptive physical education can be obtained. You have the support of a team. As a concerned parent, you will want to be an active participant on that team.

The collaboration between professional staff and parents is sometimes identified on a student's IEP as a type of accommodation. This is intended to insure that these individuals meet or confer on a regular basis and monitor the progress and needs of the student. Collaboration may be used for general problem solving, identifying needed resources, and monitoring the effectiveness of the instructional program and the accommodations. The teachers will document the process and outcomes of collaboration.

Keep the door open for input and ideas about working with your child. When your child is experiencing problems, don't be afraid to ask for assistance. You may find that other parents or teachers have had the same problems and can share successful solutions. Don't forget to talk with your child about the problems.

Sometimes a simple solution is the most effective.



Monitoring the Impact

The value of any accommodation or modification must be measured in terms of its impact on the performance and attitude of your child. Some things to consider include

- *Did your child actually use and take advantage of the accommodation?*
- *Was your child able to participate fully in the class because of the accommodation or modification?*
- *Was your child able to master the objectives of the lesson or course because of the accommodation?*
- *Did the accommodation or modification help your child to feel he or she could be successful in the class?*

If the answer to all these questions is “Yes,” then the accommodation or modification is doing what was intended. If the answer to any of these questions is “No,” then you may need to do some troubleshooting to find out why things aren’t working as planned. A different type of accommodation or modification may be needed.

Are the Accommodations and Modifications Working?

1. *Talk with your child.* Find out what is going on from your child’s point of view. If it makes sense, encourage your child to tell you about the problems that he or she is experiencing. What is confusing? What is hard to remember? Did he or she have all the materials that were needed? How can you help?
2. *Talk with your child’s teacher(s).* Find out what is going on from the teacher’s point of view. What kinds of instructional activities are particularly difficult for your child? Does your child have the background knowledge and skills needed for this class? Where do the accommodations or modifications fall short?
3. *Request a review of your child’s IEP.* If you can’t resolve the problem after conferring with your child or the teacher, an IEP review might be needed. State your concerns and bring any information that you have gathered regarding your child’s performance.

You can obtain more information about accommodations and modifications from the exceptional student education (ESE) department at your child’s school or the ESE Department at the school district office.

ESE 10753



The New Department of
Education

Jim Horne, Commissioner

