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Reasonable and Effective Accommodations Considerations Packet

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Reasonable and Effective Accommodations

Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning teams are faced with the task of determining the program modifications or supports that students identified under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 must receive in order to be able to access and make progress in the general education curriculum. Likewise, 504 committees must determine appropriate educational programs for students identified under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. In addition, both IEP teams and 504 committees must identify appropriate accommodations that students with disabilities need in order to participate in state and school division assessments.

How do IEP teams and 504 committees determine reasonable and effective accommodations for students? How do they determine how teachers can support students in specific learning situations? This C*onsiderations Packet* defines accommodations and addresses their specific purpose. The packet also presents guiding questions for determining "reasonable" accommodations, two instructional planning processes, and examples of various types of accommodations.

Definition
Janney and Snell (2004) state that "the term *accommodations* is used to refer to changes to the school program that are documented by the eligibility process and specified in a student's IEP …(that) enable the student to gain access to the classroom or the curriculum" (p. 39).

Accommodations are the purposeful changes educators make to the:
> *Environment* - where, when, and with whom students learn
> *Instruction* - how teachers teach so students learn
> *Assessment* - how students demonstrate what they learn
> *Curriculum* - what the teacher teaches

so that **all** students can learn and validly demonstrate what they have learned. An accommodation adjusts the conditions under which students accomplish tasks (i.e., the *environment* and *instruction*) without substantially changing the *assessments* or *curriculum.*

Consider the following examples:
- Mr. Zins is providing accommodations through adjustments in instruction by using videos correlated to the instructional objectives. He is not making changes to the curriculum or assessments.
- Ms. Holt, a second-grade teacher, provides Jessie, a fully included 7-year-old with developmental delay, with a quiet corner to listen to a book on tape during silent reading. Ms. Holt is providing environmental (quiet space) and instructional (auditory and visual input) accommodations.
- Mr. Jackman teaches Braille to Cassandra, an 11-year-old who is blind. This not a part of the curriculum typically taught to fifth graders, but once Cassandra learns Braille, using it will become an accommodation, simply a change in instructional materials.

Purpose

Accommodations are intended to "level the playing field" and provide equal opportunity for success (Smith, 2002). As such accommodations minimize the impact of a disability and circumvent deficiencies in specific academic areas (Bergeson, 2001). They are the *ramp to the learning highway*. The purpose of testing accommodations is to "allow students with disabilities equal access in demonstrating their achievement" (Virginia Department of Education, 2007, p. 9).

Process

Determining reasonable and effective accommodations can be a complex task. A checklist or menu approach may save time; however, it rarely enables teams to design truly individualized accommodations based on the student's needs. The checklist approach may result in too many accommodations, because all the choices look good. Instead, a process approach involves a careful review of the student's strengths and needs, an analysis of the classroom and curriculum demands, and then addresses the necessary accommodations. Several processes for determining appropriate accommodations are available. While they all consist of multiple steps and require a team approach, some are more helpful for determining universal accommodations, others are more helpful for situational accommodations..

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

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

Questions to Address in Determining Accommodations

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

The following questions may be helpful to teams as they consider which accommodations are reasonable and effective for a given student (Friend & Bursuck, 2008).

- *Is the accommodation needed because the student can't do what is expected, or is it needed because the student won't do what is expected?* (e.g., a student unwilling to do the work might need a behavior management accommodation rather than assistive technology).
- *Is the accommodation age-appropriate?* (e.g., use an audio-taped version of the textbook used in class rather than an elementary textbook for a middle school student).
- *Is the accommodation feasible, and is it easy to implement?* (e.g., circle the even numbers on a worksheet to designate items to be completed rather than create a different worksheet).
- *Do the teachers agree with the accommodation?* (e.g., provide computer time rather than candy as a reward in a behavior management plan if teachers are opposed to providing candy as an incentive).
- *Does the accommodation give the student choices?* (e.g., allow the student to decide how he will show what he knows based on his strengths and interests).
- *Does the accommodation have a record of demonstrated effectiveness?* (e.g., Learning Strategies Curriculum developed at the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning).

Planning Processes
Two planning processes are included in this packet. The first guides teachers in the creation of a lesson suitable for all learners in a classroom (Cole et al., 2000). It is most helpful for determining situational or contextual accommodations.

Step 1   Select the overall concept to be taught.

Step 2   Determine the curricular goals for students.

Step 3   Plan instruction for most learners.

Step 4   Plan for students who need accommodations.

Step 5   Check for student understanding.

Step 6   Evaluate the effectiveness of instruction up to this point and make adjustments. Consider the following areas:

- *Size*: Change the number of items to be learned or completed

- *Time*: Extend or shorten the time allotted for learning, task completion, or testing

- *Level of support*: Increase the amount of personal assistance (e.g., peer buddies, teaching assistants, peer tutors, cross-age tutors)

- *Input*: Vary the way in which instruction is delivered (e.g., use different visual aids, concrete examples, hands-on activities, cooperative groups)

- *Difficulty*: Accommodate for the skill level, problem type, or the rules for how the learner may approach the work (e.g., allow calculator, simplify directions, change rules)

- *Output*: Change how the student responds to instruction (e.g., verbal instead of written responses, drawing or outlining instead of writing, demonstration)

- *Participation*: Change the extent to which a learner is actively involved in the task

- *Alternate goals*: Change the goals or outcome expectations while using the same materials

Step 7   Reteach if needed.

The second process, *Steps for Making Individualized Adaptations* (Janney & Snell, 2004), is more helpful when planning universal accommodations for students with moderate disabilities.

Step 1 Gather information.

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

Where is the student now?
> The instructional team needs to know the appropriate instructional goals for the student and how the student learns. Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLoP) descriptions, annual goals, and objectives/benchmarks from the IEP need to be shared with all team members.

What accommodations will improve the fit between the student and the classroom while also ensuring a sense of belonging and achievement?
> The instructional team will need to discuss potential supports the student may need in order to be actively and meaningfully engaged in the classroom.

Step 2 Determine when accommodations are needed.
The team considers under what conditions accommodations will be needed (e.g., small-group work, tests, lecture, discussion, independent reading, watching films, or oral reading).

Step 3 Decide on planning strategies.
The team next determines how and when the accommodation will be planned and monitored. The amount of time this step takes depends on the extent of the student's needs and the number of different settings in which the student participates.

Step 4 Plan and implement general accommodations.

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

Step 5 Plan and implement specific accommodations.
Once general accommodations are in place, specific accommodations need to be designed for individual lessons or activities. Weekly or daily planning is needed.

Step 6 Plan and implement alternative activities (modifications).
Alternative activities are needed when a student's IEP objectives cannot be met within the context of the inclusive setting. Examples of alternative activities include the development of motor activities, instruction in basic reading or math, opportunities to preview or review material, and functional skill routines.

Types of Accommodations
Generally, there are three kinds of accommodations, environmental, instructional, and assessment.

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

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

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

Who (people)
- Change teachers for different subjects.

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

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

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

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

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

- something in the **same subject with a parallel activity**

  keyboarding during cursive writing instruction

- something in a **different subject**

  extra instruction or practice on a deficit skill

- something in **another skill area outside the classroom**

  one-on-one counseling, therapy, resource support

Adapted from *The MESH Manual for Inclusive Schools* (p. 80), by E. Kurlinski, C. Gallucci, D. Grainger, & S. Grummick, 1997, Olympia, WA: Office of Supervision of Public Instruction.

Assessment accommodations. Assessment is the process through which instructional staff determine how much and how well students have learned. Assessment accommodations allow students to demonstrate knowledge and skills without compromising the information being evaluated. They include assessment practices such as extending time limits, giving oral instead of written tests, and providing a distraction-free environment. IEP teams or 504 committees determine accommodations used on a daily basis and those used during state assessments.

Guidelines vary across instruments and among subtests. Consult with your school division's director of testing for specific allowable accommodations.

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

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

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

Presentation
- Use large print and allow ample space between test items.
- Provide a word bank for fill-in-the-blank items.
- Provide an example for each type of test item.
- Provide the appropriate format: Braille, large print (test booklet and answer document).
- Provide a magnifying glass, templates, mask or markers to maintain place.

- Increase the size of answer bubbles.
- Simplify oral or written directions; highlight important words in the directions or items.
- Interpret oral and written directions (e.g., signing, cued speech); read embedded directions and sample items.
- Read test items or provide audio-taped versions of test items and ask students to interpret them.
- Interpret embedded directions and sample items to students (e.g., signing, cued speech).
- Provide special equipment for amplification (e.g., hearing aid or auditory trainer) or communication board/pictorial presentation.

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

Conclusion
Planning, providing, and evaluating the effectiveness of accommodations for students with disabilities is a complex process. The IEP team or 504 committee is responsible for developing general accommodations to be used across varying educational settings, whereas the instructional team applies the general accommodations to specific settings. Reasonable and effective accommodations provide students with disabilities the opportunity to access and make progress in the general education curriculum.

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Additional Resources
Resources are available for loan through the T/TAC W&M library. Visit the website at http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/index.php for a complete listing of all materials. Select the "Library" link and enter *Inclusion, Accommodations, or Teaching Techniques* as the subject of your search for materials to supplement this packet.

The following websites contain further information on accommodations and supporting students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

> http://cast.org
> http://ldonline.org
> http://nichcy.org/
> http://www.schwabfoundation.org/About-CHSF/History-Archives/

This *Considerations Packet* was updated by Lee Anne Sulzberger, April 2008.