

Accommodations

Examples from State Assessment Policies

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PEER

Introduction

Education reforms designed to improve educational results for all students have been initiated at federal and state levels throughout the 1990s. The *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, national school reform legislation signed into law by President Clinton on March 31, 1994, specifies important goals and principles applicable to all students. This legislation specifically includes students with disabilities in its call for much higher standards of learning for all students. Similar requirements are set forth in *Title I of the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994*. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA-97)* further reinforce the requirements to include students with disabilities in regular education reform initiatives. IDEA-97 raised the standards for students with disabilities by requiring that they be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, and by requiring that they be included in state and districtwide assessment programs with appropriate accommodations.

These higher expectations for students with disabilities have resulted in increased attention to the accommodations students need to ensure their full access to educational opportunities in instruction and testing. IDEA now requires IEP teams to include a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of state or districtwide assessment of student achievement that students with disabilities need in order to participate in such assessments. Other accommodations and modifications these students need to participate in such assessments should also be provided.

It is important to acknowledge that use of some types of accommodations can be controversial. These issues become most apparent when the accommodation is closely related to the skill being assessed (e.g., reading a reading test). State policy which allows IEP teams to consider the full range of accommodations, including those utilized in classroom instruction, such as a reader for all subjects, should





protect against discrimination in test administration. Such a policy is crucial, especially for high-stakes tests. Additional research will be needed to address technical issues around test measurement and use of the full range of accommodations.

In an effort to assist educators, parents, and policymakers as they move toward full participation of students with disabilities in state and districtwide assessment programs, the PEER Project compiled the following examples of accommodations. The list was drawn primarily from a review of state policy documents developed by the 47 states administering state assessment programs in 1997.¹

Although states have wide-ranging policies regarding the types of accommodations available for assessments, it is important to note that test modifications must be based on individual student needs. Since it is impossible to itemize all the possible situations that may accompany a particular disabling condition in relation to a particular test or test item, a comprehensive listing of every possible testing accommodation that may be appropriate is not possible. However, the following brief descriptions of the kinds of accommodations used across the country may be useful as IEP teams consider the full range of accommodations that may be needed to provide students with disabilities full and equal

opportunity to participate in assessment programs. Accommodations for a particular child are determined on an individual basis by the child's IEP team.

School-based policy should also be developed to facilitate complex administrative issues related to implementing comprehensive accommodations.

The examples of accommodations listed in this *PEER Information Brief* are organized into four categories that should be considered by the IEP team:

- A. Timing/Scheduling Accommodations,*
- B. Setting Accommodations,*
- C. Presentation Accommodations,*
- and*
- D. Response Accommodations.*

The examples are summarized or, in some instances, excerpted from the original policy documents.

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¹ Accommodations noted in this document are from this review. IDEA does not define or categorize accommodations.

Timing/Scheduling Accommodations

Scheduling modifications should be sensitive to the rate at which the student processes information and the student's ability to successfully sustain the activity. Examples include:

- At time of day or week most beneficial to student
- Multiple testing sessions
- Extended time to complete tests
- In periods of ___ minutes followed by rest breaks of ___ minutes

- Untimed testing sessions
- . . . until, in the administrator and team's judgment, the students can no longer sustain the activity. (Allow test administrator and team to determine length of sessions and need for breaks based on observation of student's ability to successfully sustain the activity. Additional sessions would be scheduled as needed to complete testing.)²

Setting Accommodations

Flexible setting considerations should support more productive responses from the student, allowing the student to demonstrate knowledge and skills without interference.

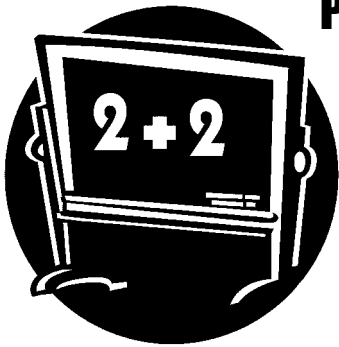
Adaptations to the environment might range from appropriate lighting to minimizing noise levels and curtailing visual, auditory, and olfactory distractions. Room temperature and seating issues should also be considered. Examples include:

- In a small group, in a separate location
- Individually, in a separate location
- In a carrel
- In the special education classroom
- With student seated in front of classroom
- With teacher facing student
- Near student's special education teacher or aide
- At the student's home
- At the hospital
- With special lighting
- With special acoustics
- Individual testing stations for students responding verbally
- With adaptive or special furniture
- In location with minimal distractions
- Students may be separated from other examinees if their method of response is distracting to other students.
- Students should not be required to take exams in corridors or other inappropriate locations.



² Note: For the most part, lengthy examples have been excerpted from state policy papers.

Presentation Accommodations



On some tests, students with disabilities may be unable to answer a test item due to the item format. The format of the item should be changed to allow the student the opportunity to complete the test.

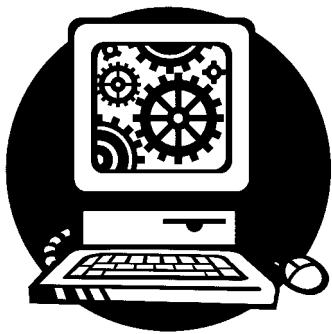
In very rare instances, when a question cannot be reformatted, it should be omitted and credit for the question prorated. For example, some tests cannot be translated into Braille or presented in sign without changing the question. This accommodation applies only when the student is unable to complete the question due to format, not due to a lack of the skill or knowledge being measured.

Examples of Presentation Accommodations include:

- Student given a written copy of examiner's instructions (from examiner's manual) at time of tests
- Practice tests or examples provided before test is administered
- Stimuli reduced (e.g., number of items on desk limited)
- Medication appropriately adjusted to prevent interference with the student's functioning
- Proper functioning of hearing aids ensured
- Directions read aloud by test administrator
- Standard directions read several times at start of exam
- Directions reread for each new page of test items
- Directions given in simplified language
- Key words in directions (such as verbs) underlined, highlighted, or marked with removeable highlighter tape
- Directions provided for each new set of skills in the exam
- Directions repeated as needed
- Student asked to demonstrate understanding of directions
- Directions given in any format necessary to accommodate student (signed, auditory amplification, repetition, etc.)
- Directions and test signed by interpreter
- Sign-language interpreter, amplification, or visual display for test directions/examiner-led activities
- Directions (nonsecure documents) reviewed prior to test administration
- Large print editions of tests
- Braille editions of tests
- Test items read aloud by test administrator
- Videocassette with taped interpreter signing test instructions and test items
- Test given by person familiar to child
- Student [physically] assisted to track the test items by pointing or placing the student's finger on the items
- Student cued to remain on task
- Physical assistance provided
- Student's test-taking position altered
- Opportunity for movement increased or decreased

- Test administered by special education teacher or aide
- Cued speech interpreters, and/or oral interpreters
- Audiocassettes used in conjunction with a printed test for multi-sensory stimulation
- Additional examples provided
- Spacing increased between test items
- Size, shape, or location of the space for answers altered as needed
- Fewer items placed on each page
- Size of answer bubbles enlarged
- Cues (e.g., arrows and stop signs) provided on answer form
- Paper placed in different positions
- Use of glasses, if needed
- Braille rulers
- Magnifying equipment (closed circuit television, optical low-vision aid, etc.)
- FM or other type of assistive listening device to screen out extraneous sounds
- Amplification equipment (e.g., hearing aid, auditory trainer)
- Assistive technology (adaptive keyboard, word processor, voice-activated word processor, graphic organizers, voice synthesizer, etc.)
- Augmentative communication systems or strategies, including letter boards, picture communication systems, and voice output systems
- Loose-leaf test booklet (allow student to remove pages and insert them in a device such as printer or typewriter for doing math scratchwork)
- Placemaker, special paper, graph paper, or writing template to allow student to maintain position better or focus attention
- Acetate color shields on pages to reduce glare and increase contrast
- Masks or markers to maintain place
- Visual stickers
- Closed-captioned or video materials
- Tape or magnets to secure papers to work area
- Mounting systems, including slantboards and easel
- Each test site should have two adults when using an interpreter to sign the test: 1) a test administrator who reads the information aloud (e.g., directions, test questions) and 2) a qualified interpreter who signs to the students. It is recommended that the school use an interpreter who has previously signed for the students.
- The interpreter must be proficient in sign language or the student's individual communication modality. The interpreter should not fingerspell words that have a commonly used sign. Test administrator and interpreter expected to attend all training sessions.





- Because the interpreter must be familiar with the concepts of writing/open-ended and multiple-choice test questions, he or she is allowed to review writing/open-ended test items for up to 15 minutes and multiple choice items for up to 2 hours per subject on the day of testing under secure conditions. The interpreters must not disclose the content or specific items of the test. Test security must be maintained.
- Proctor must have training in performing the service without giving verbal or nonverbal clues to student.
- Reading assessments may be read to student when the intent of reading is to measure comprehension, only if this is the normal mode as documented in IEP/504 plan.

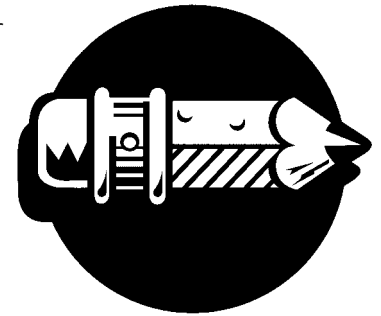
Response Accommodations

Response accommodations can range in simplicity from pencil grips and manipulatives to more sophisticated computer-based communication systems. The intent of the response accommodation is to increase the students' ability to demonstrate what they know.

Examples include:

- Student marks answers in test booklets
- Student marks answers by machine
- Student writes answers on large-spaced paper
- Student dictates answers to proctor or assistant who records it
- Student dictates answers to scribe or tape recorder to be later transcribed; students are to include specific instruction about punctuation on the Writing Assessment
- Student signs or points at alternative responses
- Periodic checks provided to ensure student is marking in correct spaces
- Spelling, punctuation, and paragraphing requirements waived
- use of response aids, such as:
 - abacus
 - arithmetic table
 - chubby, thin, or long well-sharpened pencils
 - Misspeller's Dictionary (not special accommodation – electronic dictionaries are special accommodations)
 - calculator, if documented disability interferes with mental or physical ability to perform math processes without calculator
 - word processor, typewriter, or electronic notebook, e.g., Alpha Smart
 - calculator/talking calculator or one with paper printout

- communication devices such as language board, speech synthesizer, computer, typewriter, or other assistive communication device
 - additional answer pages for students who require more space for writing due to size of their handwriting
 - pencil adapted in size or grip diameter
 - slate and stylus, Braille writers, and modified abacus or speech output calculators (re: Braille only)
 - spell-check device (either separate device or as word processing function)
 - graphic organizers, e.g., storywebs
 - grammar-check device
- Scribe — The student should know the identity of the scribe, who should have previous experience working with the student.
 - Answers to questions designed to measure writing ability in English or in a second language may be recorded in an alternative manner (e.g., dictation). Spell check and grammar check devices are permitted. Students with significant spelling disabilities may be excused from spelling requirements.
 - In general, the student who uses an aide to record responses must provide all information, including spelling of difficult words, punctuation, paragraphing, grammar, etc. Only those students whose disability affects their ability to spell and punctuate should be excused from providing such information. Modifications cannot include both a spell check device and deletion of spelling requirements (either/or).
 - Only those students whose disability affects their ability to either memorize or compute basic math facts should be allowed to use computational aids.
 - Regardless of the response option used, all student responses must be recorded in a regular test booklet before materials are sent in for scoring. If student's answers are marked in large print or separate sheet, test administrator must transfer the responses to a regular print test booklet.
 - If a student has no means of written communication sufficient to complete the writing assessment due to significant physical disability, that student can be exempted from the writing portion only of the basic skills test or high school graduation test. An exemption for this reason does not affect that student's eligibility for a regular high school diploma. Any decision to exempt a student from writing assessment should be clearly documented with justification in IEP.



Conclusion



The preceding accommodations reflect a variety of strategies that could facilitate a student's participation during testing as well as increase the student's opportunity to demonstrate what s/he knows. Accommodations should be consistent with accommodations that the student uses in his/her learning environments. The use of accommodations should not be limited to isolated events such as standardized testing. Nor are accommodations intended to provide one

student undue advantage over another. They are provided only to decrease barriers and to increase a student's ability to express his/her understanding of the content or demonstrate mastery of a skill.

The challenge for the future is to continue to expand the number and kind of accommodations and strategies that are used to facilitate access and promote meaningful participation for all students.

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