Accommodations Manual

How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students with Disabilities

Third Edition

Produced by:
Assessing Special Education Students (ASES)
State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)
THE COUNCIL OF CHIEF STATE SCHOOL OFFICERS

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues. The Council seeks member consensus on major educational issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, federal agencies, Congress, and the public.

ACCOMMODATIONS MANUAL:
HOW TO SELECT, ADMINISTER, AND EVALUATE
USE OF ACCOMMODATIONS FOR INSTRUCTION AND
ASSESSMENT OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Table of Contents

Why a 2011 edition?

Step 1: Expect Students with Disabilities to Achieve Grade-Level Academic Content Standards

Step 2: Learn About Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment

Step 3: Select Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment for Individual Students

Step 4: Administer Accommodations During Instruction and Assessment

Step 5: Evaluate and Improve Accommodations Use

Tool 1: Do’s and Don’ts When Selecting Accommodations

Tool 2: Good Practices and Resources for All Students

Tool 3: Assessment Adaptations Grid

Tool 4: Accommodations from the Student’s Perspective

Tool 5: Parent Input in Accommodations

Tool 6: Accommodations Use in the Classroom

Tool 7: After-Test Accommodations Questions

Tool 8: Assessment Accommodation Plan

Tool 9: Assessment Accommodations Agreement

Tool 10: Logistics Planning Checklist

Tool 11: Accommodations Journal for Teachers
Why a 2011 edition?

The Council of Chief State School Officers’ Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate the Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students with Disabilities was first developed to establish guidelines for states to use for the selection, administration, and evaluation of accommodations for instruction and assessment of students with disabilities. The first and second editions represent the best thinking about accommodations at the time they were written.

This third edition of the Accommodations Manual represents an update of the previous editions. With Race to the Top (RTTT) initiatives, many states have joined consortia to work together on common assessment systems using technology-based testing platforms. New policy and implementation issues with regard to accommodations for students with disabilities necessitate a revision to this manual.

Throughout this edition of the Accommodations Manual, attention has been given to addressing issues related to providing accommodations on technology-based platforms. Often, these issues have been marked with the symbol of a computer mouse.

Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer, and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students with Disabilities represents the best thinking of 2011. We continue to learn more about the effective education of students with disabilities every day, and we expect these materials to evolve and improve every year.
STEP 1
Expect Students with Disabilities to Achieve Grade-Level Academic Content Standards

With the focus of legislation aimed at accountability and the inclusion of all students comes the drive to ensure equal access to grade-level content standards. Academic content standards are educational targets outlining what students are expected to learn at each grade level. Teachers ensure that students work toward grade-level content standards by using a range of instructional strategies based on the varied strengths and needs of students. For students with disabilities, accommodations are provided during instruction and assessments to help promote equal access to grade-level content. To accomplish this goal of equal access,

- every Individualized Education Program (IEP) team member must be familiar with content standards and accountability systems at the state and district levels;
- every IEP team member must know where to locate standards and updates; and
- collaboration between general and special educators must occur for successful student access.

All students with disabilities can work toward grade-level academic content standards and most of these students will be able to achieve these standards when the following three conditions are met:

1. Instruction is provided by teachers who are qualified to teach in the content areas addressed by state standards and who know how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners.
2. IEPs for students with disabilities are developed to ensure the provision of specialized instruction (e.g., specific reading skills, strategies for “learning how to learn”).
3. Appropriate accommodations are provided to help students access grade-level content.

Most states have adopted Common Core Standards (CCS) for English language arts and mathematics. CCS and common assessments across states that are based on those standards present an unprecedented opportunity for educators to accomplish the goal of including all students with disabilities in grade-level content.

The selection, administration, and evaluation of accommodations for instruction and assessment are the focus of the Accommodations Manual: How to Select, Administer,
and Evaluate Use of Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment of Students with Disabilities.

Federal and State Laws Requiring Participation by Students with Disabilities

Several important laws require the participation of students with disabilities in standards-based instruction and assessment initiatives. These include federal laws such as the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA).

Reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Stronger accountability for educational achievement results is one of the four basic education reform principles contained in ESEA. This law complements the provisions in providing public accountability at the school, district, and state levels for all students with disabilities. ESEA explicitly calls for the participation in such assessments of all students [Sec. 1111 (3) (C) (i)]. (The term “such assessments” refers to a set of high-quality, yearly student academic assessments.) It also requires that these assessments provide for the reasonable adaptations and accommodations for students with disabilities—as defined under Section 602(3) of IDEA—necessary to measure the academic achievement of such students relative to state academic content and state student academic achievement standards [Sec. 1111 (3) (C)(ii)].

The April 2007 regulations on alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards included the following statements about accommodations:

“...a State’s (or in the case of district-wide assessments, an LEA’s) guidelines must require each child to be validly assessed and must identify, for each assessment, any accommodations that would result in an invalid score. Consistent with Title I...a student taking an assessment with an accommodation that invalidates the score would not be reported as a participant under the IDEA.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2007, p. 17750)

One of the basic reform principles of ESEA is stronger accountability for educational achievement results for all students. Through this federal legislation, in addition to other state and local district initiatives, assessments aimed at increasing accountability provide important information with regard to

- how successful schools are including all students in standards-based education;
- how well students are achieving standards; and
- what needs to be improved upon for specific groups of students.
There are several critical elements in ESEA that hold schools accountable for educational results:

- Academic content standards (what students should learn) and academic achievement standards (how well students should learn the content) form the basis of state accountability systems.
- State assessments are the mechanism for checking whether schools have been successful in students attaining the knowledge and skills defined by the content standards.
- States must provide assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics for all students, including students with disabilities, in grades 3–8 and once in high school.
- States must also provide science assessments in at least one grade in each of three grade spans (3–5, 6–9, 10–12) each year.
- School, district, and state accountability are based on measuring success in educating all students and determining what needs to be improved for specific groups of students.
- The accountability system is defined in terms of adequate yearly progress (AYP), a way to measure the improvement in achieving standards for all students and designated subgroups each year.
- Schools, districts, and states are held accountable for improvements on an annual basis by public reporting and ultimately through consequences if AYP is not achieved.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004**

IDEA specifically governs services provided to students with disabilities. Accountability at the individual level is provided through IEPs developed on the basis of each child’s unique needs. IDEA requires the participation of students with disabilities in state- and districtwide assessments. Specific IDEA requirements include the following:

Children with disabilities are included in general state and district-wide assessment programs, with appropriate accommodations, where necessary [Sec. 612 (a) (16) (A)]. The term “individualized education program” or “IEP” means a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in accordance with this section and that includes . . . a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of state or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the child to participate in such assessment; and if the IEP Team determines that the child will not participate in a particular state or district-wide assessment of student achievement (or part of such an assessment), a statement of
why that assessment is not appropriate for the child; and how the child will be assessed [Sec. 614 (d) (1) (A) (V) and VI].

Supported by ongoing educational reform efforts, such as Race to the Top (RTTT) and other initiatives passed by states, the use of assessments for accountability purposes will likely continue in the future, supported by other legislative initiatives passed by states in their efforts to implement educational reform.

Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 provides individuals with disabilities with certain rights and protects individuals with disabilities against discrimination from federally funded programs and activities. Section 504 states the following:

No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, as defined in section 705(20) of this title, shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or under any program or activity conducted by any Executive agency.

In school settings, 504 legislation guarantees and protects students with disabilities who may not otherwise have an IEP but are still considered individuals with disabilities. The definition of a student with disabilities is much broader under 504 than it is under IDEA. An important part of the 504 plans developed by schools for students with disabilities are often the lists of accommodations that the student can utilize on assessments.

Including All Students with Disabilities in State Accountability Assessments

Both federal and state laws require that all students with disabilities be administered assessments intended to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of students. IEP team members must actively engage in a planning process that addresses

- assurance of the provision of accommodations to facilitate student access to grade-level instruction and state assessments; and
- use of alternate assessments to assess the achievement of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
| CURRENT STATE REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS TO MEET GRADE-LEVEL ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS COULD BE INSERTED HERE. |
| CURRENT STATE WEBSITE FOR ALL CONTENT STANDARDS COULD BE INSERTED HERE. |
| CURRENT STATE-SPECIFIC POLICIES ABOUT THE PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN STATE ASSESSMENT COULD BE INSERTED HERE. |
STEP 2
Learn About Accommodations for Instruction and Assessment

What Are Accommodations?

Accommodations are practices and procedures that ensure that educators, as well as students and parents, have a valid measure of what students with disabilities know and can do. Accommodations use begins in the classroom. In addition, students with IEPs or students on Section 504 plans may also be provided with assessment accommodations.

Accommodations do not reduce expectations for learning.

Accommodations provided to a student during state assessments must also be provided during classroom instruction, classroom assessments, and district assessments. However, some instructional accommodations may not be appropriate for use on certain statewide assessments. It is critical that educators become familiar with state policies about the appropriate use of accommodations during assessments.

Typically, accommodations use does not begin and end in school. Students who use accommodations will generally also need them at home, in the community, and as they get older, in postsecondary education and at work.

Who Is Involved in Accommodations Decisions?

IEP teams must make assessment and accommodation decisions for students based on individual need in accordance with state and federal guidelines. Students with IEPs and 504 plans must be provided accommodations based on individual need as long as the accommodations do not invalidate the assessment. Accommodations should be documented in IEPs and 504 plans.

IEP Team Considerations for Instruction Accommodations

To assure students with disabilities are engaged in standards-based instruction, every IEP team member needs to be familiar with the state’s standards. In essence, the process of making decisions about accommodations is one in which the IEP team members attempt to level the playing field so that students with disabilities can participate in the general education curriculum. In leveling the playing field, the team should consider the following (see also figure 1):
1. Student characteristics: Reduction of the effects of a disability or language barrier.

2. Instructional tasks expected of students to demonstrate grade-level content in state standards: Assignments and class tests.

3. Consistency with standards-based IEP for classroom instruction and assessments: Fidelity to accommodations and achievement standards noted in IEP.