Parent Guide to TNReady Supports for Students with Disabilities

for the 2016-17 School Year

TN Department of Education

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As a parent of a child with a disability, you are involved in making decisions about services for your child. This guide is intended to increase your understanding of the use of accommodations in both instruction and assessment. Accommodation use is an important part of planning the educational program for your child, and many students with a disability only need slight changes to the way they are taught and tested to participate successfully in their general education classes.

Understanding Accommodations

Accommodations are tools and procedures that provide equal access to instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. Access is the opportunity and ability for an individual to participate in the instruction, discussions, activities, products, and assessment provided to all students within a public school. They are provided to "level the playing field." Without accommodations, students with disabilities may not be able to access grade-level instruction or participate fully on assessments.

> Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student's disability and do not reduce learning expectations

Accommodations are intended to offset the effects of the disability and to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills. Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student's disability and do not reduce learning expectations and should not give a false picture of what a student knows and can do. Reliance on test accommodations should never replace appropriate and rigorous instruction in the content area being tested.

Ideally, accommodations should be the same or similar across classroom instruction, classroom tests, and state or district tests. However, it is important to note that **some accommodations are only for instruction and cannot be used on state or district assessments.** Effective decision-making on the provision of appropriate accommodations begins with gathering and reviewing information about the student's present level of academic achievement, functional performance in relation to the curriculum, and the supports the student requires during instruction and classroom assessment.

The process of selecting accommodations is one in which members of the IEP/504 team attempt to "level the playing field" for a student with a disability, so he or she can participate in the general education curriculum.

- Team meetings could include discussions about providing the student equal learning opportunities and identifying practices and approaches intended to help the student overcome learning obstacles during instruction and assessment.
- Informed decision making regarding accommodations is critical to ensure that successful and meaningful participation of students with disabilities in instruction and the assessment process.
- Decisions about the provision of appropriate accommodations begin with making good instructional decisions.
- Making appropriate instructional decisions is facilitated by gathering and reviewing good information about the student's disability and present level of performance in relation to the academic content standards.

Accommodations are generally grouped into the following categories:

Presentation	Response	Timing/Schedule	Setting
These accommodations allow students to access information in ways that do not require them to read standard print. These alternative modes of access are auditory, multi-sensory, tactile, and visual.	These accommodations allow students to complete activities, assignments, and tests in different ways and to solve or organize problems using some type of assistive device or organizer.	These accommodations increase the allowable length of time to complete a test or assignment and may also change the way the time is organized.	These accommodations change the location in which a test or assignment is given or the conditions of the assessment setting.
(ex. repeating directions, read aloud, use of large bubbles on answer sheet)	*(ex. marking answers in booklet, use of reference aids, use of computer)*	*(ex. extended time, frequent breaks)*	*(ex. special study carrel, special lighting, separate room)*

Accommodations vs. Modifications

Accommodations are not the same as modifications. Accommodations are intended to lessen the effects on a student's disability; they are not intended to reduce learning expectations. Changing, lowering or reducing learning expectations is usually referred to as a modification or alteration. Unlike accommodations, consistent use of modifications can increase the gap between the achievement of students with disabilities and the grade-level expectations. This may have a negative impact on the student's educational career as the student may not continue to progress and be able to obtain a regular diploma.

State Assessment Accommodations

Federal and state laws require students who attend public schools, including students with disabilities, to participate in annual testing in specific academic areas and grades outlined in the law. **Requiring the inclusion of all students with disabilities in state and district assessments helps ensure that schools, school districts, and states are held accountable for the achievement of these students.** These laws also require students with disabilities (those individuals covered under an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504) to be provided with appropriate accommodations necessary to participate in these tests.

Standard accommodations are those that do not change the skill that is being tested. For example, the use of a calculator on items designed to measure math problem solving does not change the intended construct. A non-standard accommodation is one that will change the nature of the task or target skill. For example, using a calculator on items designed to measure math fluency is a non-standard accommodation and would not be permitted for state or district testing because it would not result in a true measure of the student's math ability. The use of accommodations that invalidate the intended construct does not give an accurate measure of the student's skills and could result in an invalidation of test scores, which would count the student as non-proficient. All IEP/504 team members need to be familiar with state policies and guidelines regarding the use of accommodations on state assessments. Making sound decisions about testing accommodations requires all team members to know:

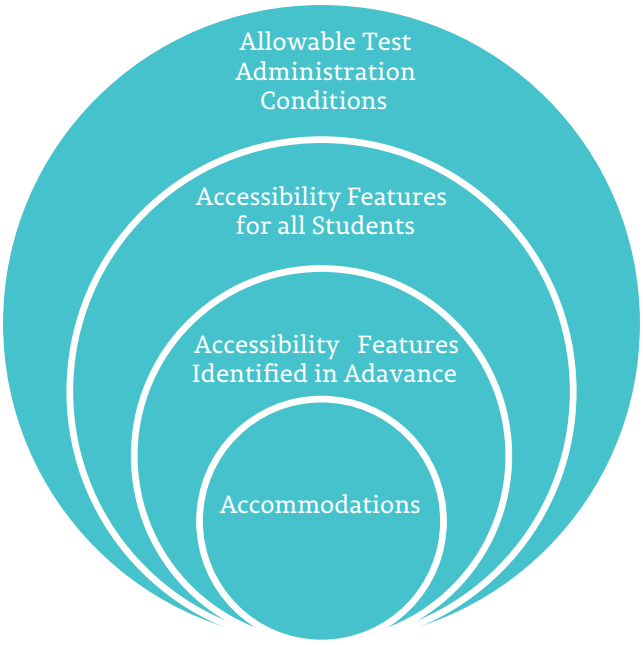
- **The test** (content, types of test questions and testing conditions)
- **The state's testing guidelines**
- **The state's accommodation guidelines**

Who Decides?

All students with disabilities (those with an active IEP or 504 Plan) are entitled to the appropriate accommodations that allow them to fully participate in state and district testing. The student's IEP/504 team selects the accommodations for both instruction and assessments. **Accommodations should be chosen on the basis of the individual student's needs, not on the basis of disability category, grade level, or instructional setting.** Once selected, accommodations should be used consistently for instruction and assessment. Each teacher and other staff responsible for the implementation of the accommodations must be informed of the specific accommodations that must be provided.

Selecting Accommodations

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) offers multiple layers of support for participating students. The figure below portrays several aspects of the assessment features including allowable testing procedures, accessibility features that are available to all students, and accommodations available as needed per the IEP or 504 plan. Allowable testing procedures and accessibility features are available to all students, including those receiving accessibility features identified in advance and those receiving accommodations. Accessibility features identified in advance are available only to students for whom an adult or team has indicated the need for the feature based on demonstrated and documented classroom need for these features. Accommodations are only available to those students with documentation of need through a formal plan (IEP or 504).



Determining necessary accommodations should be part of the development of each IEP or 504 Plan. These questions should be considered in the selection process:

- **What are the student's learning strengths and needs?**
- **How do the student's learning needs affect the achievement of the grade-level content standards?**
- **What specialized instruction does the student need to achieve the grade-level content standards?**

Next, discuss and review the accommodations the student has already been using. Ask these questions:

- **What accommodations is the student regularly using in the classroom and on tests?**
- **What is the student's perception on how well an accommodation has worked?**
- **Has the student been willing to use the accommodation?**
- **What are the perceptions of the parents, teachers, and others about how the accommodations appear to have worked?**
- **Have there been difficulties administering the selected accommodations?**

Evaluating Accommodations

Evaluating how effective the accommodations are should be an ongoing process only by closely reviewing the impact of an accommodation can improvements happen. IEP or 504 teams should not assume that accommodation selection carries over from year to year. Each year the team should review:

- **Each accommodation and the results of tests when the accommodation was used**
- **Student's perspective of how well each accommodation is working**
- **Effective combinations of accommodations**
- **Perceptions of teachers, paraprofessionals, and other specialists about how the accommodations appear to be working**

*Questions Teams **Should Ask** about Assessment Accommodations*

1. **Is the student using any accommodations during classroom instruction that will not be allowed when taking state or district assessments?**
   Because of the nature of certain accommodations, they are only allowed for instruction, not testing. If a student is accustomed to using such accommodations, the IEP team needs to make certain the student understands that a particular accommodation won't be available during testing and work to find an acceptable accommodation that can support the student during testing in a comparable manner.
2. **Are the assessment accommodations selected acceptable and allowed for the specific assessment?**
   There is a tremendous variance among acceptable accommodations for specific assessments. Be sure to follow specific assessment guidance documents, which will list acceptable accommodations.
3. **Does the student show a documented need for all selected accommodations?**
   Research has shown that IEP or 504 Plan teams frequently select accommodations in a bundle, such as extended time and a different setting. However, the student might only need one of these accommodations. The IEP team has a responsibility to make sure the student is neither under or over accommodated.
4. **Are all selected accommodations documented in the IEP or 504 Plan?**
   The student's active IEP or 504 Plan should contain documentation for all accommodations that have been selected, for both instruction and assessment. Once documented in the IEP or 504 Plan, accommodations must be provided. Implementation of accommodations is mandatory, not optional.
5. **Does the student understand how to use the selected assessment accommodations?**
   Students should have ample time to learn to use the accommodations available to them during assessments. Be sure the student is willing to use the accommodation and has used the accommodation before test day.
6. **Does the school have an advance planning process to ensure the proper implementation of the testing accommodations chosen and documented in my child's IEP or 504 Plan?**
   Accommodations are only as effective as their proper implementation. Unfortunately, implementation of accommodations can become difficult on testing days, when school staffs are stretched. Advance planning for accommodations such as quiet space, readers, or accommodated forms is critical to the ethical administration of assessment accommodations.

Finally, be sure accommodations do not lead to inappropriate testing practices such as:

- Coaching students during testing
- Editing student work
- Allowing a student to answer fewer questions or reduce the number of responses required
- Giving clues to test answers in any way
- Changing the content by paraphrasing or offering additional information

Guide to Choosing Accommodations

Presentation Accommodations

Potentially Eligible Students	*Questions to Ask*	*Instruction Examples*	*Assessment Examples*
Students with print disabilities, defined as difficulty or inability to visually read standard print because of a physical, sensory or cognitive disability	• Can the student read and understand directions? • Does the student need text routinely read aloud? • Has the student been indentified as having a reading disability?	• Large Print • Magnification Devices • Human Reader • Audio Tapes • Digital Textbook • Talking Materials (calculators, clocks, timers)	• Screen/Human Reader • Text to Speech • Braille • Visual Representations for Math

Response Accommodations

Potentially Eligible Students	*Questions to Ask*	*Instruction Examples*	*Assessment Examples*
Students with physical, sensory or learning disabilities (including difficulties with memory sequencing, directionality, alignment and organization)	• Can the student use a pencil or other writing instrument? • Does the student have a disability that affects their ability to spell? • Does the student have trouble tracking from one page to another and maintaining their place?	• Scribe • Note-takers • Tape Recorder • Respond on test Booklet • Spelling and Grammar Devices • Graphic Organizers	• Speech-to-Text • Adult Transcription • Scratch Paper • Word Prediction

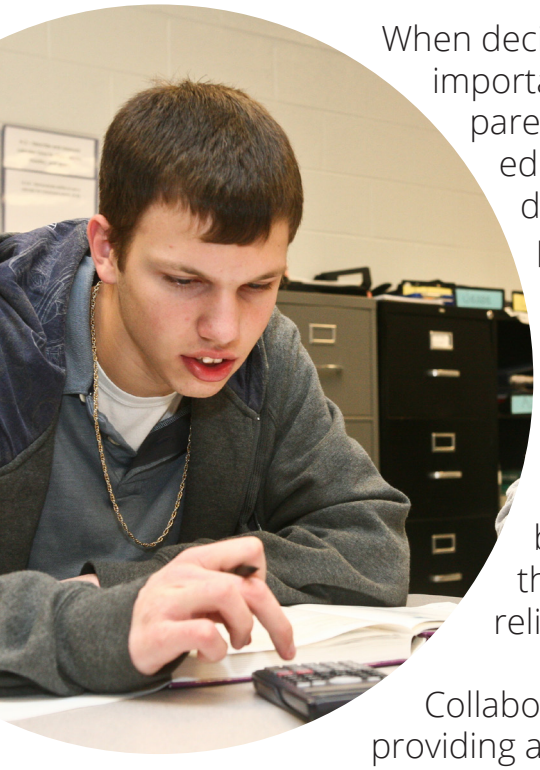
Timing and Scheduling Accommodations

Potentially Eligible Students	*Questions to Ask*	*Instruction Examples*	*Assessment Examples*
Students who need more time, cannot concentrate for extended periods, have health-related disabilities, fatigue easily, special diet and/or medication needs	• Can the student work continuously during the entire time allocated for test administration? • Does the student tire easily because of their impairments? • Does the student need shorter work periods and frequent breaks?	• Extended time • Frequent Breaks • Multiple Testing Sessions	• Extended time • Frequent Breaks

Setting Accommodations

Potentially Eligible Students	*Questions to Ask*	*Instruction Examples*	*Assessment Examples*
Students who are easily distracted in large group settings, concentrate best in small groups	• Is the student easily distracted by others? • Does the student have trouble staying on task? • Does the student exhibit behaviors that would disrupt other students?	• Change of Room or Location • Earphones or Headphones • Study Carrels	• Change of Room or Location • Earphones or Headphones • Study Carrels

Everyone Deserves Input



When decisions about accommodations are being made, it is very important that everyone have a chance to give input. This includes parents, the special education staff, vocational teachers, general education staff, and any related service providers. However, don't forget to ask your child. If your child doesn't want to use a particular accommodation, other options may be considered. It is important to remember that your child will continue to learn and develop, even if it is at a slower pace. With continued instruction on the essential skills for learning such as reading and writing, the need for certain 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.

Collaboration is a must when providing accommodations for your child. Responsibility for your child's educational program rests with many people. You have the support of a team. As a parent, you will want to be an active participant on that team. Collaboration may be used for general problem solving, identifying needed resources, and monitoring the effectiveness of the instructional program and accommodation use. When your child is experiencing problems, don't be afraid to ask for assistance and always remember to include your child in the conversation.

Our goals are the same: **we want all our students to develop real-world skills, including critical thinking, writing, and problem solving**. And, we want to move forward with each of you as partners in this work- so ultimately our schools can foster positive learning environments that focus on whole child development. Each of our children deserves to be ready for the next step in their educational journey, and TNReady is one way we make sure they are prepared for the better opportunities that lie ahead.

For more information, visit
TNReady.gov

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