



Testing Students Who Have Disabilities

Deciding whether a student with a disability should take the same tests given to other students is a big and important decision. Many tests can affect the rest of the student's life. One immediately thinks of tests like the high school exit exam, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and final examinations for individual courses. However, testing of all kinds, whether a daily quiz or chapter test, is also important.

No matter where the student is in school – kindergarten, elementary, high school, or post-secondary – many of the same questions arise. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (504) and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) provide a student with legal protection at all levels of education. However, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) applies only until the student leaves high school.

The Role of the IEP Team for Students in Special Education

The Individualized Educational Program (IEP) team, which includes the parent as an equal member, is responsible for determining how individual students will participate in statewide and district assessments programs. The IEP team should carefully review the student's present levels of performance, IEP goals and objectives, data on the impact of accommodations and modifications that are used in the classroom, and reports from regular and special education teachers.

The IEP team should also review the accommodations and modifications that the student currently uses in routine classroom testing and determine if some or all of these accommodations and/or modifications are necessary for the student to participate in the statewide or districtwide tests.

Accommodations and Modifications for Special Education and 504 Students

An accommodation is defined as a change in the testing environment, procedures, or presentation that does not alter in any significant way what the test measures or the comparability of the scores. The purpose of accommodations is to allow knowledge and skills to be assessed without the disability affecting performance. Accommodations for tests may be needed by students with disabilities whether they are in special education with an IEP OR they are in regular education classes under a 504 Plan.

Examples of accommodations:

- Setting - change in location of testing (i.e. administering the test individually or in a small group in a separate location)
- Timing – change in duration of testing within one test session (i.e. extending the time or taking frequent breaks) Note: if the test is designed to assess responses within a certain amount of time, then this may not be considered an accommodation for that test, but rather a modification – see modification below.
- Response - change in how the student responds (i.e. student may dictate or type answers or written portions of the test)

A modification is defined as a change in the test that changes the meaning of the scores. Modifications alter the comparability of test scores.

Examples of modifications:

- Alternative scoring - the use of an alternate scoring guide for determining the quality of written compositions. The alternative scoring guide focuses mainly on the content of the response and the quality of what is being said by the writer.
- Extended Writing Modifications - provide spelling and grammar assistance to the student when he/she is writing a composition for a test (i.e. use of word processors with spell-check, grammar-check, and word-prediction).
- Calculator - the calculator should be the same type used by the student in routine instruction. Note: If all students are allowed to use a calculator during testing then use would not be a modification for a student with a disability.

Advocacy Tip:

If testing accommodations and/or modifications are needed, be sure that they are specifically described in writing in the student's IEP or Section 504 plan.

Post-secondary Education is not too late for Accommodations

After high school, many students with disabilities will be continuing their education. This may include four-year colleges, technical colleges, or adult/vocational education. Post-secondary students with disabilities should talk with a counselor, 504 coordinator, or advisor about the need for testing accommodations and reach an agreement before the first test.

Students need to be prepared to provide documents about their disability as well as any previous testing accommodations from high school. Post-secondary schools are not required to do disability evaluations for students. Most post-secondary schools will not accept evaluations that are several years old. Students who have been in

special education or have a 504 plan in high school should ask for a reevaluation or update in the last year of high school. Obtaining a private evaluation can be expensive. Some students with a disability are not identified until after high school. This should not interfere with accommodations being provided in a post-secondary school if the student is evaluated and obtains appropriate documentation of a disability.

This publication provides legal information, but is not intended to be legal advice. As the law may change, please contact Disability Rights South Carolina for updates. Please let us know if you would like this information in an alternative format.

The Protection and Advocacy System for South Carolina. This publication was made possible by funding, in part, by SAMHSA. These contents are solely the responsibility of the grantee and do not necessarily represent the official views of SAMHSA.

Last updated: 2020

Disability Rights South Carolina

 1-866-275-7273

 www.disabilityrightssc.org

 1-866-232-4525

 info@disabilityrightssc.org