

# **Common Definitions: Adaptations, Accommodations, Modifications**

*Diagnostic Centers, California  
Southern, Northern, Central*

As is described in I.D.E.A. Reauthorization, individuals with disabilities are to receive a free and appropriate public education (F.A.P.E.). This education must occur in the least restrictive environment (L.R.E.), with supplementary aids and supports when necessary. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provides some clarification as to how these aids and supports are provided in the L.R.E. for individuals with disabilities:

*Aids, benefits, and services must afford an eligible student **equal opportunity to obtain** the same result, to gain the same benefit, or to reach the same level of achievement in the most integrated setting appropriate to the student's needs. These aids, benefits, services **are not required to produce the identical result, or level of achievement** for both students with disabilities and students without disabilities.*

For the purposes of clarification, the following definitions are suggested to differentiate how individuals with disabilities receive “equal opportunity to obtain results and benefits” but may not necessarily “produce identical results or levels of achievement” as compared to students without disabilities. Students participate in “least restrictive” learning environments and are held accountable for performance in those environments through curricular adaptations.

- **Curricular Adaptations** are changes permissible in educational environments which allow the student **equal opportunity to obtain access, results, benefits, and levels of achievement**. These adaptations consist of both accommodations and modifications.
  - Some curricular adaptations **do not** fundamentally alter or lower standards or expectations in either the instructional or assessment phases of a course of study and can be designated as “**accommodations**.” These accommodations provide access to participate in the L.R.E. and an opportunity to demonstrate mastery of performance standards.
  - Some adaptations **do** alter or lower standards or expectations and can be termed “**modifications**.” These modifications, although providing access, will necessitate careful selection of assessment components to achieve accountability for performance.

A student may be learning the same curriculum as others, but require substantially altered materials or instruction much lower in the developmental sequence of general curriculum in order to progress towards academic mastery. The IEP team will consider which, if any, assessment components, with modifications, validly measure progress. Additional, multiple measures of progress may also be selected by the IEP team.

A student may be participating in activities in the classroom through the use of highly modified curriculum. The goal of this participation may be to access the environment in order to work on alternate functional curriculum, with goals to achieve maximum independence and quality of life. Highly modified curriculum may be the means of achieving inclusion in the activities to achieve other outcomes. The IEP team may therefore determine that participation in general assessment does not meaningfully measure educational achievement. Assessment for this student will be an **alternate assessment** that validly measures the intended outcomes of the instruction. Additional, multiple measures of progress may be also selected by the IEP team.<sup>1</sup>

- **Accommodations** are changes in course content, teaching strategies, standards, test presentation, location, timing, scheduling, expectations, student responses, environmental structuring, and/or other attributes which provide access for a student with a disability to participate in a course/standard/test, which **DO NOT fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectations of the course/standard/test.**
- **Modifications** are changes in course content, teaching strategies, standards, test presentation, location, timing, scheduling, expectations, student responses, environmental structuring, and/or other attributes which provide access for a student with a disability to participate in a course/standard/test, which **DO fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectations of the course/standard/test.**<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is a compilation of information from O.C.R. rulings, I.D.E.A., Calif. Department of Education documents, district “best practice” procedures and Diagnostic Center Task Force discussions.

<sup>2</sup> The definitions of accommodations and modifications are with permission of the author, from: “Assessment and Evaluation of Students with Disabilities: The Legal Requirements that Regular and Special Educators Need to Know in Working with Students with Disabilities in the ‘General Curriculum’,” a presentation by Miriam Kurtzig Freedman, M.A., J.D. at the LRP 20th National Institute on Educating Individuals with Disabilities, San Francisco, April, 1999.